Nabokov Remembered

Chronicles of Culture

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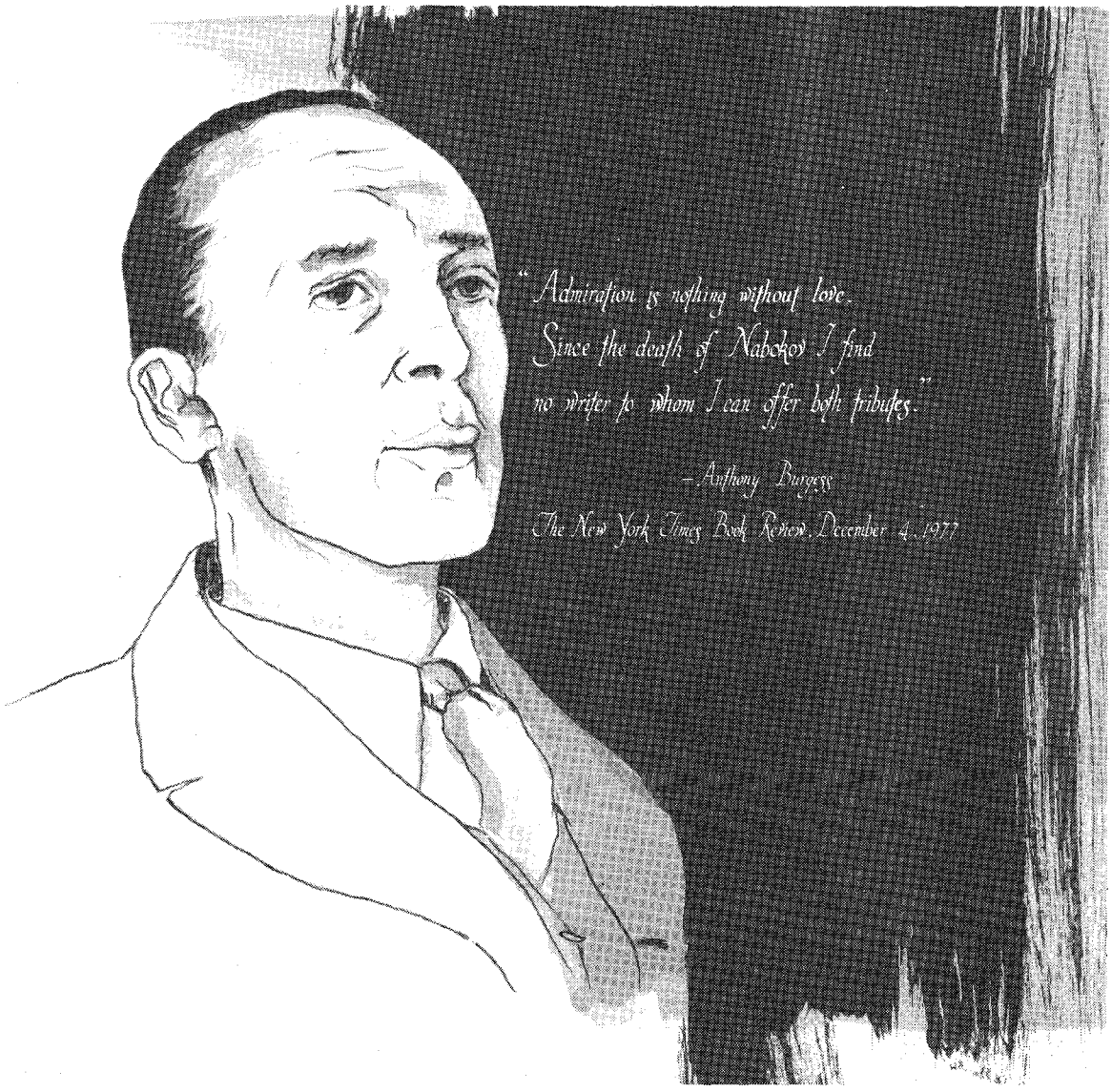
"Admiration is nothing without love.
Since the death of Nabokov I find
no writer to whom I can offer both tributes."
—Anthony Burgess
The New York Times Book Review, December 4, 1977

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Comment

In July 1977, Vladimir Nabokov died. He was an American writer whose magnitude, intellectual and literary, grew from his heritage of European civilization. A progeny of Russia's upper-class intelligentsia—a stratum specific to Eastern Europe—he coalesced the best of the cultural traditions that France and England, Russia and Germany have in common.

Before he moves into the history of literature, we, at the *Chronicles of Culture,* would like to cast a glance at his—and his work's—presence in our lifetime.

Ever since I first read *Lolita,* close to two decades ago, I have felt that everything written about that book has missed the point. From the beginning I kept running into misunderstandings on the part of its commentators. To my mind, as it read in 1958 and reads now, the novel does not require an apology for its moral stance. Even if one considers it from the standpoint of rigorous behavioral standards, it can hold its own. I would risk saying that especially *now,* when crassness submerges and encroaches on basic sensibilities, *Lolita* comes across as one of those classics that makes the invisible reportable—in keeping with Conrad's literary credo. It is, in fact, a superb case for sensitivities, for self-consciousness tormented by mortification, for the belief that the mere effort to control nature and impulse may turn into a precious value. I have always seen *Lolita* as a lament for discarded norms. Today *Lolita* more than ever sounds like a cry in the midst of the ugly wilderness of pornographic subscription offerings at reduced rates.

The popular suffrage will always associate Nabokov's name with the title *Lolita* for rather sensationalist reasons. In my opinion, it is a traditional novel. The agonies of impropriety constitute one of the oldest traditions of Western humanism and literature. Nabokov does not transgress the rules. As have many before him—from Abelard to Goethe to Faulkner—he asserts that man can get lost in the jungle of sexual feelings, but the humble recognition of his feelings determines his humanness. At the time it was published, *Lolita* was read largely as a manifesto of sincerity. Twenty years later, it has acquired a different dimension, probably the one which Nabokov had in his mind at the time of the novel's conception. Cast against the America of the "sexdomes," that is brothels operating with a pretended sociological justification under names like *Plato's Retreat, Lolita* comes into focus as a novel of redemption through shame. Even if not very much is salvaged, the moral norm miraculously emerges from it both intact and alluring. Today, when animalism is sold as a progressive lifestyle (an insult to animals, of course, as no creature except the New York pornographic entrepreneur equates degradation with pleasure), the vicissitudes of Humbert Humbert reveal shamefulness as a precious option of existence to which a person should aspire for deliverance.

Thus, when musing on Nabokov, we face an awkward syllogism: shame as an effect of psycho-sexual quandaries is supposed to be a banal, useless, regressive, unhealthy, even reactionary feeling; Nabokov saw an element of salvation in it; was he therefore a conservative, or even a reactionary?

Of course, he was. This is acknowledged even by the liberal critics, albeit all they have in mind is his conservative politics. What they rabidly deny, however is the conservative quality of his creation, the gist of his writing which is firmly contrary to the tenets of the liberal ideal and the liberal dogma. Reading what has been written about Nabokov's work since the success of *Lolita,* one has the uneasy sensation that a sort of conspiracy is operating to obfuscate the obvious, to render the literary intention reversible and turn topsy-turvy a clearly worded moral allegiance. The technique of viewing a master and his work from exactly the opposite corner he himself would have preferred to be viewed is a hoary one. Homer, Socrates, Plato, Dante, Milton, Defoe and Balzac have all suffered the same treatment. Today's liberal, so-called progressive, interpreters refuse to notice how clearly and unequivocally these masters formulated their loyalty to inherited truths, traditions and wisdom, to the continuity and permanence of values, to man's timeless duties and to the profound conviction that both human knowledge and fate transcend such feeble notions as society and progress. But the liberals, socialists and progressives have structured an edifice of idolatry on precisely these two notions, and this is why they must falsify great philosophy and great literature in the treatises with which they deluge today's culture, and in the textbooks with which they inundate the universities. To perpetuate the current ideological inanities, the entire truth about a Nabokov cannot be said.

This is why we attempt the reevaluation of Nabokov and his literature in the pages of *Chronicles of Culture.*

Among those who were forced by circumstance to celebrate the substance of the culture they were born into by means of a language other than their own, Nabokov stands as an equal of Joseph Conrad. For Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco creative work in a foreign language was a matter of technology of expression, not a reorientation toward another source of life and nourishment. "You have to be foreign to write English with that kind of hypnotized brilliance—" someone said about this kind of expatriate writing, and the paradox fits Nabokov perfectly. His demise without the Nobel prize is one of the petty errors of the Western cultural hierarchy. He will be more appreciated as time goes on. We, at the *Chronicles of Culture,* believe that our civilizational mechanism is self-corrective.

Voices are reaching us that express a wish to know more about our literary and methodological *modus operandi.* Let us, therefore, state what we see as our way of approaching cultural criticism. We depart from an assumption that culture—that is, the cultivation of ideas, arts and modes of existence—has

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fallen prey, during the last quarter of a century, to a lopsided view of its own nature, one that can be best expressed by the vulgar but telling byword "Anything goes." From all branches of knowledge and literature a body of writing has emerged whose shallowness is often surpassed only by its offensiveness, but which is shielded by an ideological dogmatism that has established a mixture of scientism, materialism and irrationality as the reigning liberal philosophy in America. It goes without saying that the criticism which comes from the Liberal Culture originates from an ideologically committed point of view. Thus, the "objectivity" of which it boasts spells something very different than its meaning in ordinary semantics.

It occurred to us that in order to challenge this state of things and restore a balance we must first create a framework of contrasting judgments and set them forth. We see our task as assessing books primarily on the basis of their ideas and messages and measuring them against *our* values, ideology, commitments and beliefs.

These judgments should be personal, but not subjective. We have little esteem for reviewers who do not know how to interpret a book other than through the adjectives "bad," "good," "beautiful" or "funny." They qualify in our eyes as newspapermen and women who report on books, plays, movies. Every book, play or movie, aside from being good or bad, performs a moral, cognitive and cultural function. It has an impact on minds. It plays a social role and if it has any power at all, it contributes to cultural trends that affect human lives. Thus, to deal with cultural facts as "fun" or "entertainment" only is to avoid the central function of the endeavor. A critic, or reviewer, who sees his duties fulfilled by giving us a briefing about the author, plot and, eventually, his own sense of what is "convincing," "boring" or "amusing," is a half-formed critic, unworthy of attention. A critic who does not bother to clarify what the author says, what he wants to say, what he prefers not to say, and finally, what influence his saying may have even if absorbed by only one person on earth—such a critic strikes us as a hack critic, merely a producer of slogans. Such critics often seek to project an image of personal evenhandedness which, in the end, turns their work into nothingness.

In our view, cultural criticism should put cultural facts—books, plays, movies, intellectual debates, issues and trends—into a philosophical, moral and ideological perspective. Anything short of this goal does a disservice to culture. It is a never-ending labor. We, at the *Chronicles of Culture,* recognize the inescapable fact that progress is not an inevitable characteristic of culture and hardly exists in the arts. If it were so, Warhol would be *per definitio* a "better" painter than Giotto, and Norman Mailer automatically a "better" writer than Dostoevski—a silly presumption and simply not true. Therefore, the answer to this rather trifling observation is to evaluate the new with the help of the oldest and best tested criteria of the Judeo-Christian civilization.

—Leopold Tyrmand

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The Feminine Novel of the Seventies

Vol 1, No. 2, November 1977

The Literary Season of Venom and Muddle in America

Tyrmand: Comment; Maloney on Galbraith; Trafton on Cheever; Fox on Davidson; Glass on Percy; Scott on Vidal; Manion on Dickstein; Commendables; In Focus; Waste of Money.

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A Form of Magic, A Game of Enchantment and Deception

Vladimir Nabokov: *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited;* G.P. Putnam's Sons; New York, 1966.

by Otto J. Scott

His Swiss governess, Mademoiselle, arrived when Nabokov was six and his brother five, in 1905—"a year of strikes, riots and police-inspired massacres." He describes her night arrival at the station, where she was met by Zahar the coachman, whose felt boots crunched the snow while he handles her luggage and helps her into the sleigh.

"Mademoiselle gives a backward jerk of her torso as the heavy sleigh is wrenched out of its world of steel, fur, flesh, to enter a frictionless medium where it skims along a spectral road that it seems barely to touch . . . leaving Mademoiselle to be swallowed up by what she will later allude to, with awe and gusto, as le steppe. *There, in the limitless gloom, the changeable twinkle of remote village lights seems to her to be the yellow eyes of wolves . . . And let me not leave out the moon—for surely there must be a moon, the full, incredibly clear disc that goes so well with Russian lusty frosts. So there it comes, steering out of a flock of small dappled clouds . . . and, as it sails higher, it glazes the runner tracks left on the road, where every sparkling lump of snow is emphasized by a swollen shadow.*

"Very lovely, very lonesome. But what am I doing in this stereoscopic dreamland? How did I get there? Somehow the two sleighs have slipped away, leaving behind a passportless spy standing on the blue-white road in his New England snowboots and stormcoat. The vibration in my ears is no longer their receding bells, but only my old blood singing. All is still, spellbound, enthralled by the moon, fancy's rear-vision mirror. The snow is real, though, and as I bend to it and scoop up a handful, sixty years crumble to frost-dust between my fingers."

That essentially poetic vision, which evokes both the memory and the grief of exile, also exhibits and reveals the artist. But it took Nabokov a long time to make that revelation deliberate. In the original version, which appeared in *Mesur,* in Paris, in 1936, the reminder that the artist was standing on a highway in New England did not appear. It was only when he reviewed the piece for *Speak, Memory* that it was revised; improved. Retouched, so to speak, by the painter before he parted with it forever—and then in such a manner as to move the viewer not only beside him, but inside him.

A subtle and revealing nature of the remembrance of things past pervades Nabokov's sentences. Such reorganization of memory had once served Proust in dissecting reality. In Nabokov's pages, the reconstruction of what's still perceptible, as well as what is not, turns into an allusive revisionism. By the magic of delicate musing and ironic sighs, by elongating the perspectives of both tenderness and skepticism, Nabokov transforms Talleyrand's famed words about the sweetness of life before revolutions into moral splendor.

Only a great poet can cast that sort of spell. Nabokov, in the vignettes that comprise his autobiography, did it twice. When these episodic recollections first appeared in various popular magazines to glitter against the drab backdrop of the late Forties and early Fifties, they seemed mere entertainments—though of a very high order. Each reflects a vanished world, with its heritage and treasures, its once-rooted security and its shining future. But, subtly reworked and strung together in the order that Nabokov had, all along, held secretly in view, they do far more than provide a portrait of the artist in retrospection. For within their completed circle, these pearled memories hold, forever fast, values that lesser men seek to destroy.

Nabokov was an aristocrat, born to great wealth, surrounded by servants and comforts, and spent his first twenty years in the warm approval of liberal parents. It would be easy to assume that his values were those of the aristocracy. But the truth was that his values were those of a world that *contained* an aristocracy—and that world was one in which all our grandparents lived and moved.

Nabokov's father was a famous liberal jurist, who defended Jews and promoted parliamentary democracy; his mother doted on games and her children. She enjoyed playing draw poker—a game learned from the diplomatic colony, which the Russian upper class played in French. *Brelan* was three of a kind and a flush was *coleur;* jokers were "ominivicarious." The entire Nabokov family played ardent tennis; in the summers went on mushroom hunts. As a boy Nabokov devoured the lurid western novels of Captain Mayne Reid—in English—while his European counterparts read their equivalents.

The family had a large country estate south of St. Petersburg and a townhouse at 45 Morskaya Street, and fifty servants. The Nabokovs were not particularly religious: Nabokov's mother held both the liturgy and the clergy of the Greek

Mr. Scott is an author of biographies of James I and Robespierre.

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Catholics in low esteem; they went to church only on Easter or Christmas.

His earliest recollections were of learning his letters—in English before Russian—and of discovering that each had a texture and color of its own. His mother was delighted; they shared that perception and even agreed on some. To the boy, a hard "g" was vulcanized rubber, a French "a" evoked polished ebony and "n" had the loose texture of oatmeal. Music, which evoked visions to his mother, was merely an irritant to the boy, but his younger brother Sergey inherited that faculty. But Nabokov's father was passionate in the pursuit of butterflies, and the boy shared that delight.

In such an atmosphere, where every desire could be gratified and pleasure was not yet associated with guilt, Nabokov learned the greatest of aristocratic truths, and possessions lost that inordinate value they create in those who cannot have them. "I inherited," he said, "a sense of the beauty of intangible property, unreal estate—and this proved a splendid training for the endurance of later losses."

Mademoiselle's arrival, when Nabokov was so young, was, therefore, a recreation. His vision of the station, the coachman, the sleigh and even the night was a creative act. Yet its truth is undeniable and his memories in general, equally creative, are equally truthful. He inherited from his father an ability to recall "a patch of the past" in complete and minute color and detail. One such moment, which remained fixed in his mind, was the sight of the first butterfly he coveted. "Pale yellow, with black blotches, blue crenels, cinnabar eyespot above each chrome-rimmed black tail . . ." A servant caught it for him and, unsure of how to preserve it, imprisoned it in a closet. When they opened the door the treasure escaped. He caught it again, forty years later, in Boulder, Colorado. How could a boy of seven know that his early passion, awakened by a yellow butterfly would, in his maturity, provide an escape from the narrow world of exile?

The other great gateway from the mundane levels of life swung open when he was fifteen, and took refuge in a pavilion at Vyra Park from a thunderstorm. The eternal world of poetry was revealed to him when "the sheer weight of a raindrop, shining in parasitic luxury on a cordate leaf, caused the tip to dip, and what looked like a globule of quicksilver performed a sudden glissando down the center vein, and then, having shed its bright load, the relieved leaf unbent. Tip, leaf, dip, relief—the instant it all took to happen seemed to me not so much a fraction of time as a fissure in it . . ."

But these and other events are told only in snatches, with their meanings conveyed in oblique and indirect allusions. "Slides" are shown by the magician, as if to an audience of inattentive children whose attentions are short who must, always, be entertained, tricked and amused until they are captured by the conclusion.

Some of the slides horrify. Peering from an oriel in his mother's boudoir in St. Petersburg he saw "a dead man being carried away on a stretcher, and from one dangling leg an ill-shod comrade kept trying to pull off the boot." Some mock the simplicities of the Darwinians, as when he observed "a protective device . . . carried to the point of mimetic subtlety, exuberance, and luxury far in excess of a predator's powers of appreciation. I discover," he added, "in nature nonutilitarian delights I sought in art. *Both were a form of magic, both were a game of intricate enchantment and deception."* (Italics added).

Only rarely does aristocratic disdain appear, as in his downward look at Freud, held high in the world, whom he describes as living in "a vulgar, shabby, fundamentally medieval world, with its crankish quest for sexual symbols (something like searching for Baconian acrostics in Shakespeare's works) and its bitter little embryos spying, from their natural nooks, upon the love life of their parents." But even that thrust ends in a laugh.

For Nabokov enjoyed life, and could laugh. He knew, as indeed he could not help but know, that his liberal father, a member of Kerensky's cabinet, had helped release forces that had, as his grandmother predicted, turned them all into paupers. But Nabokov loved and respected his father, whom he described as a member of "the great classless intelligentsia of Russia." He did not despise the impulses that beggared the family.

The slides appear endless, and they flash kaleidoscopically; each arresting enough to catch and immerse the reader completely. The curtained compartments of Wagon-Lits and Biarritz in the old days; the atmosphere of Berlin when Hitler was running for office against Hindenburg; the smug chambers of Cambridge intellectuals who would hear no evil of the saintly Lenin. It is only toward the end of the performance, which strings together pieces that privately required painful hours to cut and polish, that the magician unbends toward the audience he has held enthralled.

He had spent, he says, "a prodigious amount of time" during the years of exiled poverty in Europe, in creating and solving chess problems. In May, 1940, with the Nazis on the horizon of France, he finally received, by a bribe "to the right rat at the right office" a visa to go to America. With his wife and child asleep in the next room, he exulted with cigarettes and by drawing one such chess problem late at night. Years later he provides that problem, which symbolizes the position in which life had placed him, and the method by which he had managed to "mate Black."

Having thrown that large key to the audience the magician bows, says a few graceful words of parting, and brings to a close the vignettes, the jokes, the asides and the slides of the life of Vladimir Nabokov.

Only then does it become clear that the great artist did not weave his web to disclose, but to share. All of us who read today are either already cultural exiles or threatened by that possibility. Nabokov has not only described the essence of that condition, but has also drawn our attention to the fading of the light—while all the time we thought he was simply being amusing. □

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The Sweet Melancholy of Civilization

Vladimir Nabokov: *Ada or Ardor: A Family Chronicle;* McGraw-Hill, Inc.; New York, 1969.

by Mary Ellen Fox

"For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair"
—Keats: *Ode on a Grecian Urn*

In the "anything goes" cultural era in which we are living, moral shock induced by behavior slowly becomes a rarity, even a treat. Titillation, once the preserve of the jaded rich, is now a relic from the past—it either means brutalization or cruelty, or it means nothing to all those to whom being scandalized once meant heightened awareness of their own sensitivities. Modern day attempts to arouse human appetites are today considered as tantalizing as cold spaghetti. Cast against this unappetizing *plat du jour,* Vladimir Nabokov's erotic masterpiece, *Ada,* which should be read with relish by sensitive sensualists everywhere, renders our embattled culture a paramount service by reaching a pinnacle of delicacy, humaneness and sensuality.

Ivan (Van) Veen and Adelaida (Ada) Veen, fourteen and twelve years old when they meet and first cousins, fall passionately in love and continue an illicit affair for more than eighty years. The precociousness of their amorous relationship is given from the outset a subtly ironic irrationality and it is heightened by their actually being brother and sister, due to convolutions in a family tree as complexly baroque as their Russian-Irish ancestry. It soon becomes redeemed, even in a principled eye, by emotional tensions and aesthetic piquancy that transcend the commonplace reality but do not adversely affect our moral tastes. Their tender antics are silhouetted against Ardis, a bucolic never-never land first cousin to the Shakespearean Forest of Arden and the Garden of Eden. Their frolics are the embodiment of innocence and eroticism—*Paul et Virginie* rewritten by Ovid. The serpents in this Eden (the lifelong necessity of keeping their love a secret, Ada's fickleness, Van's jealousy) never totally disrupt the idyll, and at the end of their lives together Ada and Van compose a narrative of shared experiences and feelings through the perspectives of Love, Time and Memory.

Nabokov borrows the first line of *Ada* from the introduction of an illustrious countryman; he writes: "All happy families are more or less dissimilar; all unhappy families are more or less alike," attributing it to *Anna Karenina.* Since Tolstoy actually opened his great novel of love and guilt and torment with a line alike in sound but the exact inverse in sense, it is clear that Nabokov is signaling to us his great preoccupation: *memory* as colored by *imagination.* His novel is a carefully deliberated weaving together of past events and emotions perceived through the illusory scrim of memory. Thus, during the 1880's Van sports dungarees and wristwatches, a lipsticked Ada romps in bikini and sneakers, assorted characters drink cocktails, motor about in automobiles, cover vast distances in airplanes, and make moving pictures. These are the playful tricks of memory; time does not stand still but we do. The juxtaposition of Van at fourteen wearing dungarees with Van at ninety-four wearing a hearing aid is really the same Van, loving the same Ada, however "changed considerably in contour as well as in color." Nabokov's touch transforms these physical changes into delicate human comedy. When Van, the quintessential libertine, is described as balding, it arouses a chuckle of tenderness; when Colette's Chéri returns to Léa and tries to uncover the beautiful mistresses of the past in the corseted feminine bulk, it becomes the symbol of his tragedy. While Chéri is betrayed by memories, Nabokov embraces them as a "constant accumulation of sensa . . . (and) images." Images become memory, memory creates and recreates images. These facets of life (which Nabokov underlines as pivotal) give *Ada* a lightness and comedic jubilation.

Nabokov celebrates the past and transforms it into a value: it becomes the Past, complete with tradition, grace, meaningfulness and conventions. The very forbidden quality—by natural and social law—of Ada's and Van's involvement and the need to keep it *sub rosa* do much to intensify their ardors and to prolong for a lifetime something as transient as passion.

Prevalent throughout is a yearning for a bygone age when the world was younger and fresher. The joyful intimacies of Ada and Van are suited to a pagan world before the Bible and even before Freud. To fully appreciate Nabokov's daring and originality, imagine the treatment of love and lust between brother and sister written in contemporary literary conventionalities: an abundance of anti-erotic mechanical descriptions of sexual functions, resembling a plumber's manual, along with imprecations against bourgeois social morality a la Thorstein Veblen.

And, of course, the language! Nabokov, master of pun and word play, frolics in English, Russian and French, "the three greatest (languages) in the world." Those one does manage to catch *(Le Château de la Flèche,* Flesh Hall) only underline all those that are elusive, and that Nabokov, like Joyce, is his own best audience and is having a wonderful time. There are numerous references to Joyce in *Ada,* and even more to Proust. References to Swann and Odette, to Marcel and Gilberte underline Nabokov's awareness of the similarity of

Dr. Fox has contributed to the Chronicles of Culture *from its beginning.*

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his and Proust's preoccupations: time and memory.

Love. Language. Time. These are the leitmotifs of the novel, and form a triumvirate and progression: body, mind and soul. *Ada* is the twentieth century's most delightful erotic frolic; it is also, as Van Veen writes in the book's epilog, "much, much more." Seen from the perspective of the late 70's, it makes Nabokov's proposition of coloring memory with imagination a new civilizational manifesto. One wonders how many contemporary woes—sensibilities blunted to the point of atrophy, the cheapness of both human life and death, hysterical terrorism, bestiality presented as hedonism—can be confronted with this deceptively light-minded recipe. Cultivation as norm and value can rewrite the cultural code of societies and civilizations, even those so bent on mindless change as our time and society. Here I stand, Nabokov seems to say, with all the silly irreverence, called by many culture, that I inherited from my past and my ancestors, and all their failures and blunders that took a lot of effort to commit. To me, these are my riches, a splendid foundation of the present and the future. For this allegiance—call me whatever you wish. □

Against the Bolshevik Nightmare and the Fraud of Revolution

Vladimir Nabokov: *Invitation to a Beheading;* G.P. Putnam's Sons; New York, 1959. *Bend Sinister;* McGraw-Hill; New York, 1973.

by Paul Gottfried

A student once asked a professor of comparative literature, where one should look for an explicit statement of Nabokov's political views. After reflecting for a moment, the teacher responded: "Certainly not in his novels!" The answer is true, inasmuch as the author of *Lolita, Pale Fire,* and other numerous novels and short stories was rarely given to grinding political axes in his books. True, his elegant prose and fondness for opulent, old-world settings show that Nabokov was no practitioner of proletarian art. His literature contains no celebration of oppressed classes nor any glorification of social upheaval. In fact his stock and trade consist of keen interest in *haut monde* personalities, sympathetic depictions of upper-class indulgences, playfully contrived plots, and verbal acrobatics.

These characteristics have been duly noted by Nabokov's reviewers, many of whom have praised his craftsmanship while making allowances for his supposed provincialism. Nabokov, we are led to believe, was a Russian exile who never understood the modern world. What better proofs were there than his avoidance of "serious social issues" and his continued residence in a florid Swiss hotel, from which he and his wife rarely ventured forth during the last decade of his life?

Although such observations might well bring solace to the *Saturday Review's* editorial staff, they deserve to be challenged as untrue. For one thing, Nabokov was in fact politically sensitive. His literature makes political statements, even while usually ignoring the rudely contemporary.

His autobiography, *Speak Memory,* for example, nostalgically recalls his happy upbringing in and around St. Petersburg in the years immediately preceding the First World War. His father, Vladimir Dmitrievich, an eminent jurist, was made a member of the last Russian diet (Duma) to be summoned by the Tsar in 1912. Although the elder Nabokov favored a constitutional reform of the Tsarist government, he strongly opposed the Bolsheviks, and fled with his family from the Russian capital following the communist seizure of power there in November, 1917. For a time thereafter the Nabokovs accompanied the White (anti-Bolshevik) Armies under the command of the brave, but ill-fated General Anton Denikin. When Denikin's army, badly supplied and abandoned by their French allies, was forced to give up its struggle, the young Vladimir left Russia with his parents for exile in Western Europe. The events of the Russian Revolution moved him deeply.

As a child, Nabokov had learned English from his governess and became sufficiently expert in his adopted language to obtain admission to Cambridge University by the end of 1919. There he won honors in the study of French and Russian literature. He early engaged in a solitary intellectual guerilla with his professors and fellow-students about the nastiness of the communist regime. By 1920 he waged unsuccessfully a heated debate at the Cambridge Union with a reporter from *The Manchester Guardian* on the merits of the communist state. His defeat was owing to his inability to demonstrate to the judges his own detachment in speaking about Lenin's atrocities. At Cambridge his attacks on the Bolsheviks were interpreted, with typical liberal "fairness," as being little more than expressions of peeve at his family's loss of station. It gave him a lifelong taste of Western liberalism.

Undaunted, Nabokov took up his pen in 1927 to denounce the Soviet state on the tenth anniversary of its founding. In an essay for *The* (English) *Rudder* he complained of the "putrid odor" caused by the most recent commemorations of the communist victory in Russia. The

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bases of the new order were mass slaughter and "an ugly stupid little nostrum which turns Russian simpletons into communist ninnies, which makes ants out of people, a new species called Formica marxi var. lenini." Above all he mocked "the sham aura smacking of middle-class Philistinism that is in everything Bolshevik." In the name of combatting bourgeois society, the Bolsheviks were reducing culture to "political harangue" and to "the grey pages of *Pravda.*"

The attack on communist brutality and tastelessness finds a further echo in a Russian poem composed in 1944, as the tide was turning for Russia in her war against the German invaders. Nabokov admonishes his fellow-*émigrés* against allowing their sympathy for the Russian people to render them oblivious to Soviet evils. He holds up to ridicule the "tinsel Soviet Rus," the mechanized officialdom of the proletariat homeland. And he cautions Russians in exile who have grown soft on Stalinist tyranny: "I am a poet, and so I must ask you to count me out.'

Nabokov's abhorrence of collectivist tyranny also yielded two allegorical novels, *Invitation to a Beheading* (1938) and *Bend Sinister* (1947). The first work is his response to the Moscow show trials of the 1930's. Stalin, forcing his fallen rivals to grotesque and debasing forms of public "confessions" prior to their executions, corroborated his worst premonitions about the "soul" of both revolution and communism. In *Invitation to a Beheading* the protagonist is imprisoned and condemned to death for a crime the nature of which is never made clear. Nabokov's reading of Kafka's *The Trial,* with its bleak picture of existential desperation, surely left its mark on this particular plot. But of even greater dramatic impact for the author was Stalin's treatment of political adversaries as the "manure of history," many of whom were reduced by torture to the condition of mental and physical pulp, ready to accept preposterous charges "for the good of the communist party." Like the discredited Bolsheviks in real life, the prisoner in the novel is asked by his oppressors to cooperate in his own execution. Rather than walking sullenly to the scaffold, he is urged to dance on his way there and, then, to graciously bow to his executioner.

For all its political undertones *Invitation to a Beheading* may still be judged as a kind of universal allegory. The events take place in the distant future, while the society described appears sufficiently unlike the Soviet to enable its author to escape any charge of writing a baldly political novel. By contrast, *Bend Sinister* is the most unmistakably political, albeit one of the least read, of Nabokov's books. The setting here is a small Slavic country somewhere in Eastern Europe; its people have recently come under a dictator, obsessed with the principle of perfect equality. The historical point of reference is the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe at the end of the Second World War and the subsequent imposition of communist dictatorship upon their peoples. The hero of the work, Adam Krug, is a professor of philosophy living in a country now subject to the new order. In a rapid sequence of events, his wife is lost to illness and his social position and freedom to the change of regime. While it is certainly apparent here that Nabokov despises the collectivist and egalitarian designs of the communist leaders, his delineation of the villains sometimes suggests greater artistic revulsion than moral outrage. Paduk, the people's dictator, bears the Russian name for toad; needless to say, he and his associates are made to appear physically loathsome. They seek to reduce their subjects to philistine conformity, by imposing everywhere their image of a new socialized man. Faced by the obdurate individualism present in Krug's character, they feel compelled to break him, and undertake this job, first, by humiliating him and, then, by torturing his son to death.

The political intent of *Bend Sinister* is so apparent as to refute any interpretation of Nabokov's literature as being apolitical. Although this novel does avoid political commentary, it likewise indicates his thorough distaste for the Soviet state and for modern egalitarianism in general. It is not surprising, however, that literary critics paid tribute to Nabokov in the fifties for the erotica of *Lolita,* while hardly noticing his frank depiction of socialist dictatorship ten years earlier. After all, so many of the current makers of fashionable cultural opinion are as fervent in their opposition to anti-communism as they are in their reverence for anti-Victorianism.

As a writer Nabokov took decisive political positions, without ever descending to Maileresque poses. Even his least overtly political literature gives evidence of his hatred for social and cultural leveling. As one of his biographers has noted, communists and radicals are never treated by him with sympathy, while his love for the "old Europe," though sometimes mingled with a critical spirit, is readily apparent from his characterizations. Moreover, Nabokov himself asserts the unresolvable opposition between art and beauty, on the one side, and the collectivist Left, on the other. His rejection of the Soviet experiment was grounded as much in his commitment to literature as in his objection to Lenin's concentration camps and to Stalin's purges. In a very real sense, his art may well be considered a counter-revolutionary activity: a cultural continuation of the struggle of the White Army against communist rule.

His essay for *The Rudder* had already outlined the task of the Russian writer in exile. He describes himself and his fellow-*émigrés* as "the wave of Russia that has left her shore." Yet, precisely because of their separation from the Russian motherland, they alone of their entire nation are celebrating not enslavement, but "ten years of contempt, fidelity, and freedom." By the time of his death, Nabokov, the artist and man, had extended this glorious celebration of freedom and beauty to a period of almost fifty years. □

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Lolita Then and Now:
Matter-of-Fact Confession of a Non-Penitent

Vladimir Nabokov: *Lolita;* G.P. Putnam's Sons; New York, 1958.

by Thomas Molnar

There may yet develop, in literary and legal circles, a *"Lolita* case," as there has been a case of *Ulysses* and of *Lady Chatterly's Lover.* This does not mean that Nabokov's book reminds me of either; if similarities are to be searched for, I would think of the eighteenth-century *Les Liaisons dangereuses* by Choderlos de Laclos, and, nearer to us, Thomas Mann's *Confessions of Felix Krull.*

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Lolita is a confession too, although certainly not of a penitent. It is far less matter-of-fact than Laclos' novel which is, like *Lolita* the narrative of two systematically planned seductions by an older man, one of his victims being a sixteen-year-old girl, conquered under the eyes of her young fiance.

Lolita's originality is that it speaks of the unspeakable in such a manner that it becomes credible, understandable, almost normal. As Lionel Trilling says, the reader simply cannot work up sufficient indignation; instead, he remains an amused observer, a sophisticated peeping Tom. Austere censors may, of course, warn him of the sensuous atmosphere in which the story is immersed, the quasi-incestuous relationship between Humbert Humbert, a scholarly, analytical-minded, very good looking "big hunk of a man," and his twelve-year old stepdaughter, the boyish-girlish "nymphet," Lolita. The censor's case is even better when he points out that this rapport borders on the horrifying since Humbert marries Lolita's mother in order to be closer to the child, and becomes the involuntary cause of his wife's death which gives him access to the nymphet's —no longer innocent—bed.

More than one bed, many beds. The last two-thirds of the novel is a fantastic journey through the forty-eight States, through motels, hotels, lodges, and rented homes, the dreary, uniform scenes of desperate love-makings and furtive side-

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"Oh, How You Have to Cringe and Hide!"

Vladimir Nabokov: *Lolita;* G.P. Putnam's Sons; New York, 1958.

by Dain A. Trafton

In his essay "On a Book Entitled Lolita," Vladimir Nabokov gives a humorous but troubling account of his difficulties in finding a publisher for the book that is now considered his masterpiece. After he had finished "copying the thing out in longhand in the spring of 1954," he dispatched it to four American presses, one after another, and received four letters of rejection in return. It seems that the novel was even more shocking than either Nabokov or "a wary old friend," who advised anonymous publication, had foreseen. One publisher opined that *Lolita* could send both him and Nabokov to jail. Another "regretted there were no good people in the book." Some assumed the work to be deliberate pornography (and, Nabokov suggests, may have been not only shocked but bored). All considered the theme—the passionate love of a middle-aged man for a twelve year old girl, a "nymphet"—"utterly taboo."

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Nabokov claims that he did not care whether his novel was judged pornographic or not. *"Lolita,"* he asserts, "has no moral in tow," and aims only at affording an experience of "aesthetic bliss." The rest of us, however, ought to care whenever narrow-mindedness and lack of imagination in high places (whether in government or business) fail to distinguish between true art and pornography. Every time the publication or sale of a *Madame Bovary,* a *Ulysses,* or a *Lolita* is hindered, another "martyr" is created that can be exploited by pornographers to discredit the fight against real filth. That *Lolita* finally appeared under the auspices of the Olympia Press in Paris, a house known for its trade in erotica, provides a sad comment on the judgment of American publishers. *Lolita* is not pornographic. Nor, in spite of Nabokov's rather defiant assertion, is the "aesthetic bliss" that the novel furnishes devoid of morality. It may be true that the book contains no "good people," but taken as a whole it expresses the rich, humane, and moral vision of life that informs all great art. Indeed, *Lolita* instructs us in the qualities that separate conscientious artistry from meretricious sensationalism.

As Nabokov himself points out, pornography cannot be defined simply as literature that deals with sex. The term describes not the subject matter of a work but rather its manner and spirit. Above all, the pornographer aims at one effect—the stimulation of lust—and he scrupulously subordinates every detail to that end. "Thus," Nabokov writes, "in pornographic novels, action has to be limited to the copulation of clichés. Style, structure, imagery should never distract the reader from his tepid lust." There is nothing tepid about *Lolita's* treatment of sex, but neither is it lustful. On the contrary, "action," "style," "structure," and "imagery"—often thought of as merely aesthetic or technical elements—func-

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Confession of a Non-Penitent

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glances at suspicious innkeepers, hotel guests, and chambermaids. In an epilogue Nabokov relates that some twenty years ago he had developed the basic plot in a short story. One can easily imagine that in such a form, appropriately pointed, the theme may have been morbid and obscene, with the hero, like Dostoevski's Svidrigailov, a grim seducer of children. But in a book of more than three hundred pages, *Lolita's* narrator cannot remain such a figure.

Humbert is a feather-weight intellectual, with his point of gravity situated below the belt; but he becomes a tragic—although at the same time comic—character in his pursuit of an impossible happiness for the morsels of which he pays an ever higher price of self-debasement, humiliation, and remorse. The depth of his personal inferno is aptly measured by two episodes; the moment when Lolita, still unaware of her mother's death, finds her new stepfather in her own bed, intent like a lover, fearful and humble like a dog waiting to be patted; then that other moment, this time one of painful reminiscence, when Humbert recalls the picture of himself, having just possessed Lolita and now adoring in her the suffering, debauched child, but with lust again rising in him, imperious, demanding submission.

The central question the reader ought to ask of himself is whether he feels pity for the girl. Our ethical ideal would require that we look at Lolita as a sacrificial lamb, that we become, in imagination, her knight-protector. Yet this is impossible for two reasons. One is very simple: before yielding to Humbert, the girl had had a nasty little affair with a nasty little thirteen-year-old in an expensive summer camp. Besides, she is a spoiled sub-teenager with a foul mouth, a self-offered target for lechers, movie-magazine editors, and corrupt classmates. The second reason is that throughout their not-quite-sentimental journey, Lolita remains as unknown to us as to Humbert himself, seen only in bed or in the car, existing only through the lustful gaze of her stepfather. She remains an object, perhaps even to herself, and only at the very end, as a teen-age mother, married to a simpleton and comically serious in her vulgarity, does she become human, no longer a corrupt little animal, and no longer a nymphet.

Yet both she and Humbert, her mother and friends, the many people we pass by in the lust-and-anguish-driven car, form a fantastic, wonderful cavalcade of humanity, described, analyzed, judged with incomparable virtuosity. It has been said that this book has a high literary value; it has much more; a style, an individuality, a brilliance which may yet create a tradition in American letters.

This is because Nabokov's writing has the rare quality of dominating the reader, body and mind, his curiosity and fears, his capacity for pity, amusement, tears and laughter. The author rides with him up-hill and down-vale, enmeshes him in the marvels of a description, or entertains him, as a veritable mental juggler, with the urbane tricks of a cultured conversationalist.

Mr. Nabokov complains in the epilogue that he had to abandon his wonderfully rich, flexible and docile Russian for an English in which he can be no better than second rate. Never have I heard of such false, although likable, modesty! Mr. Nabokov's English is beautiful and immensely suggestive, espousing with the greatest ease the mood of men, the color of landscapes, the ambiance of motels, girls' schools, and small towns. It is an ocean of a language, now calm, limpid, transparent, then turning into a roar, with waves upon waves of scintillating metaphors, images, innovations, allusions. The author swims in this ocean like a smooth-bodied fish, leaving the pursuer-reader amidst a thousand delights. □

(The Commonweal, Oct. 24, 1958)

Appendix:

I wrote this review of *Lolita* almost 20 years ago. Today, I have ambivalent feelings about the review, perhaps also about the book. The reason is that in the meantime pornography has become a way of life and a symbol of political and cultural liberty. True, the difference between Nabokov's work and the *Hustler's* world is enormous: the first has style, proportions, form, and depth, the second is, as Bernanos would say, a corpse agitated by teeming maggots. Yet, I suspect that *Lolita* could have, may have, given part of the impetus which later grew, like a cancerous tissue, into a decadent society's obscene death throes. Should Nabokov be brought to a so far adjourned court hearing? And I, too, for a lack of foreknowledge? —**Thomas Molnar**

"...You Have to Cringe and Hide!"

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tion to control the presentation of the novel's shocking events and place them within a context of broader human concerns.

Lolita is cast as a memoir written from prison by the main character, Humbert Humbert, "a neurotic widower of mature years and small but independent means, with the parapets of Europe, a divorce and a few madhouses behind him." He tells his story—his early life in Europe, his marriages, his move to America, his obsession with nymphets, and especially, of course, his love affair with Lolita, the daughter of his second wife—as he awaits trial for the murder of one Clare Quilty, a playwright and fellow nympholept who stole Lolita from him. At times Humbert indulges in paeans to the intoxicating joys of his obsession, but the structural device of the memoir, which makes us aware from the outset that his joys have led to crime and despair, shadow every effusion. Characteristically, moreover, the effusions themselves lose their bloom as they develop. The style shifts. Richly

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sensuous images of enchantment give way to sinister tones, and irony cuts into self-indulgence.

Consider the long passage that introduces the reader to the almost mythical power of nymphets. Humbert begins by evoking an "enchanted island" in time, surrounded by "mirrory beaches and rosy rocks," and inhabited by maidens between nine and fourteen whose beauty is irresistible. As he proceeds, however, it becomes clear from his own words that this beauty is not only irresistible but also dangerous and reprehensible. Nymphets possess a "fey grace," but their charm is "insidious" and "soul-shattering." To love them, you have to be "an artist and a madman, a creature of infinite melancholy, with a bubble of hot poison in your loins and a super-voluptuous flame permanently aglow in your subtle spine (oh, how you have to cringe and hide!)." Here the imagery and even the syntax—the effect of the parenthesis, for example—clearly function as instruments of moral judgment as well as means to "aesthetic bliss": "a bubble of hot poison" is not an invitation to vicarious lechery.

Surely Humbert is not a "good" man of the kind that one editor simplistically required, but his view of himself is hardly justificatory, and his presentation of Lolita refrains from dwelling upon her as a mere object of desire. Indeed, the honesty with which he portrays her adolescence compels him to record his gradual recognition of the monstrosity of what he does to her. Near the end of the novel, having understood that Lolita has abandoned him forever—she has left Quilty and is more or less contentedly married to a very ordinary fellow named Dick—Humbert recalls an earlier scene, during their affair, when he caught her observing the normal affection between another father and daughter: "I saw Lolita's smile lose all its light . . . It had become gradually clear to my conventional Lolita during our singular and bestial cohabitation that even the most miserable of family lives was better than the parody of incest, which, in the long run, was the best I could offer the waif."

The story of the love between the man who wrote this and the "waif" he describes cannot be reduced to "the copulation of clichés." Pornography dehumanizes because it incites us to think of men and women as mere instruments of pleasure; *Lolita* steadfastly refuses the reductionism of lust. □

Sentimentality as Oppression and Deliverance

Vladimir Nabokov: *Pnin;* Doubleday & Co.; New York, 1957.

by Christopher Manion

Timofey Pavlovich Pnin, Assistant Professor of Russian at a college in New England, is as difficult to understand as his name is to pronounce. We come upon him sometime in 1954, on the way to give a lecture in Cremona, only to find that he has boarded the wrong train. Throughout the story we wonder whether Pnin wasn't born into the wrong world, slightly out of tune with himself as life brings him burdens and he brings others a sense of the ridiculous, almost a commonplace spoof of the madcap professor. Waindell College is certainly a caricature of the ivied halls, complete with an artificial lake, portraits of campus contemporaries carrying on with the likes of Aristotle and Pasteur, and a French department head who can't "do the parley-voo" but opines that Chateaubriand was a famous chef.

Mr. Manion is a graduate from Notre Dame in the field of political theory.

Pnin, an untenured Assistant Professor for nine years, finds life painful: he moves nearly every semester (for "sonic reasons"), spends as much time as possible among the musty old volumes in the library, and gloats in the knowledge that the decreasing number of students in his classes each year will allow him more time for research. Unquestionably out of his element in America, he adapts by learning the English of Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Poe, and thirty-one presidents. Dr. Hagen, his department head, is his sole supporter in a sea of strangers who see him only as a comic figure; Pnin responds with an excessive familiarity with the mother tongue, and we are treated continually to his Pninisms: "There is an old American saying that people who live in glass houses should not kill two birds with one stone." The sadness sinks deeper when we are told from the start that "as a teacher, Pnin was far from being able to compete with those stupendous Russian ladies scattered all over academic America, who, without having any formal training at all, manage, somehow, by dint of intuition, loquacity, and a kind of maternal bounce, to infuse a magic knowledge of their difficult and beautiful tongue into a group of innocent-eyed students in an atmosphere of Mother Volga songs, red caviar, and tea."

A sad figure indeed. What no one at Waindell knows (and which makes him all the more worthy of our compassion) is that he was once married to a Russian woman in Paris, who married him only because another man rejected her. She left Pnin after the wedding, then reappeared to secure herself safe passage to America with Pnin, her legal spouse, and her lover and next husband, a certain Dr. Wind, on the same ship. Liza—that was her Russian name, though Pnin called her Elise—was a student of Rosetta Stone, "one of the more destructive psychiatrists of the day," and Doctor Wind was so immured in group analysis that he considered even siamese twins as a "group."

Pnin is a multilayered novel. At one point, Liza visits Waindell to tell Pnin that her son, Victor, will enter a nearby

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boarding school. Pnin, the unreformed dreamer, faces her in his characteristically intense way only to find that she wants money and is still writing bad poetry ("mostly in halting anapest"). But she also tells him that Victor's father, who has left her for South America, considers Pnin the "water father" of the boy. A victim of one oppressively submissive devotion, Pnin is on his way to fall into another emotional trap. His encounter with Victor indicates no special grace, no exception from his norm of awkward speech, uncomfortable conversations, and general absent-mindedness. The youngster has long since adopted a condescending attitude towards his parents and was distinctly unsuited to the soccer ball and Zane Grey novel which Pnin had provided as gifts. But an unexpected, unspoken harmony of their spirits results, a retreat for all sorrows to come.

A housewarming party is given at Pnin's new house. The most celebrated arrival is not that of a guest, but of a gift: "It has come enclosed in a box within another box inside a third one, and wrapped up in an extravagant mass of excelsior and paper that had spread all over the kitchen like a carnival storm. The bowl that emerged was one of those gifts whose first impact produced in the recipient's mind a colored image, a blazened blur, reflecting with such emblematic force the sweet nature of the donor that the tangible attributes of the thing are dissolved, as it were, in this pure inner blaze, but suddenly and forever leap into brilliant being when praised by an outsider to whom the true glory of the object is unknown."

And the bowl steals the show. Indeed, the affair is otherwise a total failure: the inane academic arguments combine with the steadily increasing level of intoxication. Since few of them like Pnin anyway, and know him as little as they like him, it seems they have little to do after bestowing superlatives upon the beauty of the punch bowl but drink, get tired, argue, and leave, all while Pnin congratulates himself on his resounding success. In fact, it is his only friend, Dr. Hagen, sober enough to overhear that Pnin plans to buy the house, who must break the news to Pnin about his moving on to another college. Thus, Pnin will have no more supporters with which to secure yet another year of untenured service at Waindell, and call a house a home, the first he would have owned in his life.

Poor Pnin: he thought that he would find a home at Waindell, and that, perhaps, "not next year, but example given, at hundredth anniversary of Liberation of Serfs—Waindell will make me Associate." He does not understand such basics of the academic reality that if he speaks French fluently, this disqualifies him from the ranks of potential French teachers. But he cleans up after the party, almost breaks his symbolic punch bowl, rescues it nevertheless from wreckage, and soon thereafter, aching with bruised sensitivities, goes ahead with sad preparations for leaving Waindell.

The reader cannot help but wonder: Why is Pnin so steadfast in his ways? In all the superficial aspects he has tried to be an all-American: he indulges in sunlamps, his false teeth are a "mouthful of America," and he learns to drive. But for a long time after learning to maneuver the car, "Pnin had been totally unable to combine perceptually the car he was driving in his mind and the car he was driving on the road." This might be said of his life as well. The real Liza might not be worthy of such lifelong devotion, manipulative, mean creature that she is. Pnin could easily rationalize himself into modernity by courting the conveniently available graduate student, Betty Bliss, and divesting himself of his debasing fondness for Liza. His reasons he keeps to himself (he steadfastly opposes the whole notion of psychiatry, to which Liza and Wind have dedicated their careers: "It is nothing but a kind of microcosm of communism . . . why not leave their private sorrows to people? Is sorrow not, one asks, the only thing in the world people really possess?"). He prefers to carry his burdens with him, like the cross which he has worn around his neck since childhood. "Perhaps I would not mind losing it," he explains to his closest friend. "As you know, I wear it merely from sentimental reasons. And the sentiment is becoming burdensome. After all, there is too much of the physical about this attempt to keep a particle of one's childhood in contact with one's breastbone."

But these burdens Pnin chooses to bear, and Nabokov does not insist that they be shed. In fact, he seems to be full of great respect for the privacy of Pnin, and for his loyalty to the devotions which bind him, however foolishly, to images of the past. Pnin is allowed to suffer the tension between human frailty and the reality of unrequited love, and to respond to it according to the slavic instincts of submission as conquest. He never becomes the pawn of a diatribe on the politics of Russians in exile, or the paltry politics of campuses in the repressive McCarthy era. The reality we see emerges in a much richer tone, enveloping Pnin with the many dimensions of the demands of existence without opting for a simple, unidimensional resolution of his "problem." He is not a tragic figure; if that term can be applied to anyone at all, it is Liza who must be regarded as the shallow, demeaned, and worn victim of her modern *hubris.* Pnin fights to preserve the precarious balance between the existential darkness and the irridescent bowl which carries the sum of his loves, as it lies stuffed with all his other belongings in the back of Pnin's car—in which we see him for the last time, with his cross around his neck and his car sandwiched between two beer trucks on the road out of town. □

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The Value of Art and Order

Vladimir Nabokov: *Pale Fire;* G.P. Putnam's Sons; New York, 1962.

by John Glass, Jr.

To call *Pale Fire* a poetic novel would be to indulge in a kind of Nabokovian jest: rather than a poetic novel, it is a novel which includes a poem. The poem, however, is only one element, for among other things *Pale Fire* is an extended academic joke depending for its effect upon the discrepancy between the 499½ couplets by John Francis Shade and the commentary by the editor, Shade's erstwhile neighbor and colleague at Wordsmith University, Charles Kinbote. Shade's poem, left apparently only one line short of completion by the poet's untimely death, is clearly autobiographical, concerned especially with the suicide of the poet's only daughter and with metaphysical speculations which follow that event and Shade's own heart attack. The poem's couplets, composed by a man who earlier had written a book on Alexander Pope, are carefully wrought and their meaning is seldom other than clear—or so it seems until the reader comes to Kinbote's commentary. Insisting that without his comments Shade's poem has "no human reality at all," Kinbote proceeds to explain that "Pale Fire"—the title is from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens,* although Kinbote is unable to locate the source—actually conveys the fairy-tale history of Charles the Beloved, last King of Zembla, who was imprisoned by revolutionaries but escaped to America where he became a professor of Zemblan literature and—yes—editor of the last and greatest poem of the late John Shade. Indeed, poor Shade was shot and killed, Kinbote insists, by an inept Zemblan assassin who really was intent upon murdering the unfortunate Charles. The joke, one thinks, is amusing, if perhaps a trifle over long.

Mr. Glass teaches English literature at Rockford College.

The matter, however, is more complex than it appears, and the reader, at first rather comfortably disentangling the elements of what he takes to be reality from the fantasy of Kinbote's Foreword and Commentary, may begin to wonder whom the joke is on. Students in introductory courses in literature are regularly warned to beware of first-person narrators; one must, they are told, evaluate not only the story but also the reliability of the narrator, on whom after all the reader is dependent for all he knows of the story. Edgar Allan Poe, whose work Nabokov admired, notoriously creates such problems. "Nervous," begins one of Poe's narrators, "very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am! but why *will* you say that I am mad?" The words cast doubt over all that follows, and more than one perplexed freshman has finally been moved to ask how one can be sure that a murder really does occur in "The Tell-Tale Heart." An unbalanced narrator—and Charles Kinbote is at least that—leaves the reader off balance and raises serious questions about the nature of the "reality" conveyed in the fiction.

According to what the reader is told is the official report of the matter, John Shade was killed by an escaped lunatic named Jack Grey, who mistook Shade for the judge who had had Grey committed. Kinbote's more elaborate theory, on the other hand, makes Shade's death the work of one Jakob Gradus, a member of a Zemblan revolutionary group called the Shadows, and Kinbote carefully works out correspondences between the composition of "Pale Fire" and the approach of Gradus, even discovering—or fabricating—an allusion to Gradus in what Kinbote claims is a variant discarded by Shade. The possibility that Kinbote in fact composed the lines in which he discovers the reference to Gradus raises a still more unsettling question: If Gradus and the whole story of Charles the Beloved of Zembla are products of the imagination of Kinbote, may not Shade and "Pale Fire" also be? The question is less easy to answer than one might suppose. Nabokov has had a good deal of fun with shadows, shades, and reflections, with the mingling of illusion and reality.

The academic joke and the puzzling combination of reality and fantasy serve to enhance rather than diminish the impact of the novel, forcing the reader to acknowledge finally that disentangling the real from the fictional is not the object of the game, that after all *Pale Fire* is a novel, that Gradus, Grey, Shade, Kinbote, and "Pale Fire" are all products of the imagination of Vladimir Nabokov. That is not to say, however, that there is no object to the game. What Nabokov offers is an opposition not between illusion and reality but between chaos and order. Gradus-Grey, whether a Shadow assassin from Zembla or an escaped maniac, is an embodiment of chaotic and destructive forces, even, in Kinbote's presentation, suffering acute internal disorder himself during the last stages of his quest. Shade, on the other hand, has given to his experiences as child and man, husband and father, scholar and poet, the clearly defined pattern and order of his poem, and it is hardly irrelevant that Nabokov chose to cast that poem in so restrictive a form as the heroic couplet.

Between these extremes of chaos and order stands the comic and pathetic figure of Charles Kinbote, homosexual, pedant, and madman. Kinbote's efforts to establish a connection between Shade's poem and the career of King Charles of Zembla represent an undertaking not altogether unlike the composition of the poem itself, an attempt to give form and the permanence of art to chaotic experience. The result may be absurd, but the effort is not contemptible.

Kinbote's character is, of course, central to the novel, and the choice of Kinbote as narrator creates difficulties

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Commendables

Price's Eloquence

Ray Price: ***With Nixon;***
Viking; New York, 1977.

Only a few newspapers have mentioned this volume of fascinating reminiscences—which are impassioned without vehemence and committed without bigotry. Price was Nixon's speechwriter, but many prefer to call him the former president's conscience. In his book, he makes no apologies, and whatever psycho-socio-drama took place in John Dean's twisted ego he remains for Price a squealer. When asked during an interview why he always gives the best light to the darker side, Price answered: "I don't pretend to be objective." Yet, his subjectivity makes an impression of a remarkably balanced introspection and his elaborated insights stand up to the tests of reason and logic. *The New York Times* called his book "the most eloquent defense of Nixon so far." We call it the most commendable. □

Sayle's Effort

John Sayle: ***Union Dues***
Atlantic Monthly Press; Boston, 1977.

How does a white coal-miner's family react amid the corrosive tomfoolery of the '60s? How do its members view and confront the clownishness of suburban middle-class off-spring gone berserk? How do they feel towards the rhetoric of the era, in which they prominently figure as "people" for whom "revolutions" are conceived, preached and planned? Mr. Sayle tries valiantly to describe and fathom a phenomenon of which the sloganeering was poisonous and the substance absurd and surrealistic. But periodic follies, like the ideological frenzy of the '60s, are rooted in shallow and fashionable sentiments; they thus can be correctly assessed by history which is a self-evaluating element. To approach them successfully in a novel, a writer needs a socio-moral principle which can serve him as a yardstick to evaluate human affairs embroiled in the ironies of existence. Mr. Sayle, however, seems to be contented with a *c'est la vie* philosophy which weakens his analysis and narration. Nonetheless, all glory to Mr. Sayle for his aspiration to nail down the obvious which for so long seemed so elusive for so many. He has a gift for accomodating everyone's private logic and predilections, which enhances his readableness and credibility, but subtracts from his intellectual weight. □

Waugh's Obnoxious Wisdom

The Diaries of Evelyn Waugh;
Edited by Michael Davie; Little, Brown & Co.; Boston, 1977.

Whatever can be said of Evelyn Waugh as a human being (various possible and grave inculpations come to mind), as a writer he is still underrated in spite of all that has been said to his credit over the last 30 years. In our opinion, he is this century's foremost puncturer of the stupidity and viciousness which have been promoted in the name of freedom, equality, progress and enlightenment. The fact that he disinfects the inflicted wounds with pure vitriol makes him in many eyes a monster. Others, ourselves included, tend to forgive his acidity in return for the patches of beatitude that Waugh provides to those who feel harsh justice should be meted out for mutilating reason, and scorning the civility of permanent principles. Moreover, anyone who has read "Put Out More Flags" or "A Handful of Dust" can't help but have a warm spot in his heart for their author, the untidiness of his misanthropy notwithstanding. As the greatest executioner of the Radical Chic and Fashionable Cant in our lifetime, Waugh deserves our love and gratitude, and his voluminous diaries can only recruit for him new, even if grudging, admirers. □

Greeley's Crusade

Andrew M. Greeley: ***Neighborhood;***
Seabury; New York, 1977.

Father Greeley is known in America as a pugnacious and often perspicacious columnist. To this must be added a solid reputation as an agile sociologist and a busy director of the Center for the Study of American Pluralism at the National Opinion Research Center in Chicago. Aside from other concerns—among them the current humiliation of moral philosophy, contemporary decay and assorted social blights—Father Greeley is a knight-warrior for urban neighborhoods. He sees in them a benefit to all, a bright and humane construct for community living that remains valid and viable. We buy his explication of what is happening to them and why it's a calamity. We are even more in favor of his exegesis of why all those bad things should not be permitted to happen to them and why protecting them would be good for our health and future. To reenforce his effort we would like to quote a remark of his fellow Chicagoan, Saul Bellow, who, in his Jefferson Lecture, tells about an old Chicago Pole, who with both melancholy and sagacity complained about the forces of modern life unleashed on him by contemporaneity: "Look what they did to us. They ruined our best slums . . ." □

Longrigg's Wistful Sigh

Roger Longrigg: ***The English Squire and His Sport;***
St. Martins Press; New York, 1977.

A cornucopia of information about the traditional rapport between Englishness and sports. In our time, it is already an overused banality to relate the sense of fairness, bred by a properly developed sporting spirit, to the general characteristics of social and political life. We all

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know that the British played by the rules on every field of their civilization—except foreign policy and warfare, of course—and that British civilization flourished. Then, voices began to be heard among the Britons that sporting life, fairness and the pleasures of playing according to the rules are all junk while sophistry, satiation, psychoanalysis, cocaine and self-hatred could be much more interesting. No one knew better how to put a finger on this juncture of history than Evelyn Waugh. He was not alone, other bright minds tried to issue valid warnings, but Marxism combined with bitter intellectual shortsightedness were stronger, and today the British pound isn't even worth two dollars. Therefore it is good to leaf through Mr. Longrigg's book and read it as both enjoyment and caveat. □

Morrison's Escapism

Tony Morrison: *Song of Solomon;* Knopf; New York, 1977.

It is not chic for a Black writer in our country to evoke—even if through lingering cultural reminiscences—tradition, myths, the Bible, and a multitude of petty enigmas of ethnic aberrations. A Garcia Marques in Colombia is allowed to do such things, but he is a card-carrying communist party member, so nothing should reduce the enthusiasm for his off-beat literary ways. But a good Black-American is supposed to know for sure whom to blame for what, and not waste his/her time on socially ineffectual, even abortive, escapism. *The New York Review of Books* wrinkled its nose at *Song of Solomon's* "symbolic sensationalism," which may be symptomatic for this kind of lack of sympathy Ms. Morrison's novel may find among some whites. Nevertheless, the charms of folklore Ms. Morrison knows how to evoke may carry her toward some duly deserved literary awards. □

In Focus

The Lost Temple of Delight

by Nancy Yanes-Hoffman

Anne Sexton: A Self-Portrait in Letters; Edited by Linda Grey Sexton; Houghton Mifflin Co.; Boston, 1977.

Sylvia Plath: The Woman and the Work; Edited by Edward Butscher; Dodd, Mead; New York, 1978.

There is a Chinese curse, "May you live in interesting times." The times of both Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath were interesting, if neurosis, self-flagellation, pain, an emotional roller-coaster may be described as interesting. "A Glamour of Fatality hangs over the name of Sylvia Plath," says Irving Howe, in his "Partial Dissent," one of the few clear-eyed, hard-headed essays in *Sylvia Plath: The Woman and the Work.* The same "Glamour of Fatality" hangs over Anne Sexton's head when *Ms. Magazine* passes the terminal verdict that "Anne Sexton's life has been defined by her suicide"—a profound "truth" from that journal's repertory of unctuous slogans. Sexton's and Plath's importance to the literary world must begin and end with their poetry, not with their suicidal obsessions, which finally lead them both to their self-made gas chambers.

Friends, discussing their poetry over too many martinis in Boston's Ritz bar, New Englanders, compulsive letter-writers whose letters hide more than they reveal as their poems do not, Sexton and Plath have been apotheosized by an adoring feminist cult—for all the wrong reasons. For suffering, for anguish, for the appetite voracious for reassurance, for the coward's (who lives in us all) fear of the future. Both "confessed poets," influenced by Robert Lowell and John Berryman, they never thought to ask, "Why live?" (As Sexton wrote in her poem about Plath's suicide, "Sylvia's Death.") The appeal of suicide was a self-evident affirmation.

Plath and Sexton are both minor poets, because their voices remained fragile and fragmentary, self-deprecating and precious, because they never connected with the fearsome structure of existence. As Keats put it so well, "Ay, in the very temple of Delight/Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine." Sexton and Plath are well-steeped in the melancholy. The sense of the temple of Delight, however, eludes them. This reduces their poetry to an often exquisite recitative of poignant introspections, their sensitivities to finesse, and their insight into the human condition to a refined sublimation of oneself—that is of a spiritual particle cast against the slogans of modernity. □

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Fowles' Accomplishment

John Fowles: *Daniel Martin;* Little, Brown & Co.; Boston, 1977.

It is an impressively acclaimed novel. From all corners of the American cultural scene have come critical voices which have nothing but praise for it. Trustworthy people, polled for the pre-Christmas shopping choices, effusively extolled it. What made it find its way to both the best-seller list and to the preferences of sensible tastes?

Aside from the narrative qualities, for which Fowles is known, perhaps it's the tone of poise in regard to the familiar turmoils of the present, and the search after the timeless, poignant and humane. Fowles has been considered up to now a *romancier* who safely moved on the surfaces of depths; he perhaps was not afraid of diving into the more dangerous undercurrents of existence, but preferred cruising over them gracefully with the help of technical skills—compelling story-

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telling and smooth delineation of both characters and situations. This time, he has reached for a greater profundity, ventured into more elusive dimensions of the self-imposed task—and the result seems a success. The reader responds with comprehension and involvement—and what more could a writer yearn for? Perhaps for durability in human minds, or for a part in shaping human consciousness, or for a momentous discovery of the epoch's alchemy? A writer who accomplishes that feat, remains a presence, his message, or exegesis, lives after he's gone. A writer who has written *just* an excellent novel whatever its virtues, values and brilliance—is just a *successful* writer. Into which category Mr. Fowles falls after *Daniel Martin,* it's difficult to tell now. Within a couple of years, he and we will know whether he'll be accepted as a literary measuring module, or reviewers given to nostalgic references will mention him as one of the success stories of the '70s. □

Waste of Money

Harrington's Socialdemocracy Blues

Michael Harrington: ***A Journey to the World's Poor;***
Simon & Schuster; New York, 1977.

In this book, Mr. Harrington is plagued by an imperative to reject the nagging of his own conscience which needles him about the dismal destitution of the world's underdeveloped, starving South as juxtaposed with the overweight, industrial North. He does not want to rely on conscience, but wants to see action based on proper planning, research, and the conversion of a bad capitalism into a good one. Eventually, he subsides into conscience-ridden griping, and ends up, quite predictably, with the old, safe, anti-capitalistic grievances, as well as with the conviction that U.S. labor unionism is an oasis of idealism. He is unable to explain why, although planning is virtually a global phenomenon, the world is economically in a worse mess than ever. He knows even less why Russia, which has *total* planning, must import basic food from the remnants of the "anarchistic" free market which have survived, in limited form, here and there. All in all, he knows very little, bravely admits a lot of helplessness, but then boldly resorts to condemning and suggesting, which, of course, makes his initial modesty void. □

Snepp's Fast Buck

Frank Snepp: ***Decent Interval;***
Random House; New York, 1977.

Another "passage" in the anti-CIA paranoia. Intelligence agencies inevitably hire a number of street-wise, swaggering go-getters who fall for the trench-coat mystique and playing with a gun. At the very first sign of their bragging about their "connection" they are dropped and left to themselves, which leads to their becoming raconteurs in cheap bars. In totalitarian countries, they soon disappear in gulags. In Western Europe—they occasionally survive as small-time luncheonette owners with plenty of pub Jamesbondism to spill over the counter, or they may even marry a rich widow who likes to listen to their tales. In America, they write books in which they denounce their former employer and the liberal critics sing the praises of their low-brow historiography.

Like others of his stripe, Mr. Snepp puts the blame for historical disasters on his immediate superiors whom he hates the way the prototype sergeant smarts against the commissioned officer. If he had read Homer, he would know that in debacles the petty people must find human scapegoats, while the real culprits are gods who had previously decided who would be the loser and who would be the winner. At its dawn, literature discovered that the causes of catastrophes involve a cosmic mess, a scourge visited upon the doomed by Moira. Thus, the rout during Vietnam's last days must not be blamed on the visible bunglers, but on the new Olympus of public opinion to which the lesser gods of the presidency, Congress, and the Colbys have bowed. Their underlings in turn—generals, ambassadors, CIA agents, etc.—were simply bewildered mortals whose impact on events was similar to that of the Royal Navy's equipment on what happened at Dunkirk. But Mr. Snepp, as he freely admits, joined the CIA at an early age in order to evade the draft, thus small wonder he had no time to study and learn from the fountains of ancient wisdom. This is why *Village Voice* called him "a hero for accuracy . . ." and praised him for "a kind of loyalty." Loyalty to whom? Accuracy in what? Those are quandaries that do not trouble a liberal reviewer. □

Hamill's Irish Schmalz

Pete Hamill: ***Flesh and Blood;***
Random House; New York, 1977.

There have always been and still are certain preconditions for a picaresque saga, a street ballad, or a modern gutter epic: a romantic morality and some trueness to old-fashioned, even if naive, values. Cynicism and rancorous savvy have never worked in this literary genre; neither have they worked in any literary vision of the world shaped by a mere intellectual search for behavioral kinkiness. When artsy, modish and pseudo-intellectual pretensions come from pure sensationalism, tailored to Gotham's "sophistication" and labeled literature, the results are laughable. This is exactly what happened to Mr. Hamill, a Manhattan gazeteer, *Daily News* man-about-town, and convivialist of the city's chic bohemia. He presents an amusing case of altar boy chutzpah by trying to write an all-American epic about manliness.

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It was meant to pay homage to his Irish-Brooklynese roots. Not a bad idea, as Irishness, its lyrical colorfulness cum physical gesturing, is a time-honored fabric for literary dramas about pugilistic heroism. But Mr. Hamill wanted three prizes at once: to write an honest novel, to get applause from fashionable magazines and the waiters at Elaine's, and to make money. An endeavor that complex must end in a jar with Irish schmalz, strongly flavored with 42nd Street peep show room odor—and it did. Pressed by those three powerful urges, Mr. Hamill penned his youthful *picaro* as an intrepid fighter who sleeps with his mother, and finds twisted pleasures in both fighting and incest. He is an antiracist to boot, which wouldn't hurt him if, by any chance, he wished to switch over to politics. The result is a shifty contrivance plus energetic writing plus doleful flop. □

Kosinski's "Comic Laughter"

Jerzy Kosinski: *Blind Date;*
Houghton Mifflin Co.; Boston, 1977.

Lavish ads in newspapers display a face of someone who obviously covets the style of a Garment District Marquis de Sade. He is clad in hundreds of dollars worth of custom-made casualness. The publisher's blurb says that Mr. Kosinski responds to the modern world's horrors with "cosmic laughter." Hard to know what it means, perhaps Count Dracula's brand of merriment. But Mr. Kosinski's books and success are not from the B-picture league. Mr. Kosinski, thanks to the Liberal Culture's fascination with morbidity, is rated as a serious novelist, once chosen to be a National Book Award laureate. He is a duly acknowledged purveyor of the new demonology, a New York jet-set's pet authority on spying, the liberal concept of anti-totalitarianism, sexual excess, nickel-and-dime catastrophism, on all of which he propounds "philosophical" innuendos. Friendly critics see in him "hallucinatory qualities" and "demonic powers," and the reviewers at *Time, New York Times* and *Publisher's Weekly* liken him to Dostoevski, Kafka, Celine, and still they draw their salaries from their employers. He is *tout court*—a modish writer.

Thus, while learning in *Blind Date* about the protagonist's sexual intimacies with his mother, the thoughtful reader's first impression is that incest must be *in* among publishers and critics in New York, otherwise Mr. Kosinski would have looked for another "stunning shocker! . . ."—as *Publisher's Weekly* describes this *oeuvre* in an accolade. His career in America has demonstrated that neither plausibility, nor moral certainties, nor the nourishing doubts of intellectual torment are welcome on the current literary scene, while abomination, cynicism, sham and cruelty are. There is a special market for "bionic" fantasies about sexuality and violence not only for adolescent bullies and never-grew-up truck drivers, but also for the jaded *Harper's Bazaar* and *Women's Wear Daily* circles —the feeble-minded socialites, the beautiful people for whom hashish has lost its thrill, the elite freaks from Regine's. There is still room for pornography for those who consider themselves above the artistic pleasures distributed by Linda Lovelace and her ilk, but who nevertheless crave bestiality without plebeian smells. Mr. Kosinski has become a master at packaging such merchandise into spurious sophistication—a pity, in point of fact, as he debuted with two innovative novels *(The Painted Bird* and *Steps;* in the latter he acutely described a reality morally disjointed through the electronic impulses of a technologized code of behavior) and he was vested with promise that has evaporated during the ten years of his publicity triumphs. A sense of the complexities and charms of normalcy are prerequisite for a novelist who wants to be taken seriously; they are alien to Mr. Kosinski. He lives in a reality deprived of even the pettiest of moral questions and consequences—a blatant naivete even for a pessimistic sage. He pictures putrefaction as life's *only* substance, and blank stares at pain, blood and hunger as the *only* humanness. His world is a dingy dump of Park Avenue triplexes. His literary ambition seems to be the highest possible financial revenue that can be gained by discovering new reasons for hatred, a latter-day miner panning gold nuggets in the sewer. □

Sheehy's Kaffee-Klatsch

Gail Sheehy: *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life;*
Bantam Books, Inc; New York, 1977.

Passages is a durable best-seller, now in paperback. Everything that you could find out from an intelligent and well-seasoned grandfather, if you had one, or from a good kaffee-klatsch 50 years ago, is in that book.

Anyone who treasures his uniqueness has another thought coming when he reads it. It offers a staggeringly simple explanation of all our problems, turmoils and misbehavior. Confronted with the obnoxious conduct of their six year olds, concerned mothers could always console themselves with the thought that it's just a stage which the kids will outgrow. According to Gail Sheehy, nothing much changes as we go from 6 to 46. Growing older—one hesitates, in her context, to speak of growing up, much less of maturing—involves a myriad of such stages: the self at one age is transformed into a newer self with other predictable, although not avoidable, crises. It is exactly these stages—or passages, as she terms them —which occur when bored husbands philander, frustrated wives run away after 25 years of marriage and 48 year old executives drop dead. Sheehy comes up with abysmally profound answers to such puzzlers as why people marry (need for security and fear of being alone), why men fear turning 40 (intimations of their own mortality), and why women are unhappy (they live vicariously through husbands and progeny). She gives the raison d'être for her book: "It

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Stage

Mamet's Toying with Realism

David Mamet: *The Woods;* St. Nicholas Theatre, Chicago

by Neil Thackaberry

> "Psychology, which works relentlessly to reduce the unknown to the known, to the quotidian and the ordinary, is the cause of the theatre's abasement and its fearful loss of energy."
>
> —Antonin Artaud

David Mamet, a Chicago playwright of talent, young, upcoming and already a focus of attention, seems to build his works on a tacit acceptance of Artaud's premise. He is perceptive enough, though, to recognize the danger of violating audiences' expectations. In spite of the absurdists and those who came after, psychological realism is still the style of choice for would-be playwrights who wish to succeed. Mamet's task is therefore to present something far more complicated than realism while maintaining the essential external elements of that style. This is precisely what he accomplishes in his most recent play, "The Woods."

Two persons are cast into an apparently realistic situation. A young man, Nicholas, has invited his current female companion, Ruth, up to his family cottage in the woods for a weekend of isolation, conversation, and assorted intimacies. A conflict arises from a misunderstanding of intentions, Nick asks Ruth to leave, then changes his mind and she ends up staying. There is nothing in this series of events which breaks with accepted standards of reality.

The excursion beyond those criteria begins when we notice that in spite of the psychological realism which conditions the incidents, the play is charged with tensions which can't be explained away with habitual logic. The source for most of these tensions lies in the characters' desperate attempts to understand one another. Understanding becomes a need and the latter is made evident in a number of ways. Storytelling, direct appeal for communication, and demonstration of the consequences of misunderstanding—they all determine the importance of intelligibility as a *conditio sine que non* of humanness.

At this point Mamet makes it clear their communication conflicts are pronounced not by immediate circumstances, but by the essential difference between the mind-sets of the two people on stage. However, instead of individualizing it, the playwright grounds this difference in the attitudes of culture and current mores—a familiar dramatic device. If a weekend of sexual activities between consenting adults is a currently acceptable recreation, Ruth's seeing in such a weekend a commitment by Nick to a long term relationship becomes a display of her bad manners. Nonetheless, throughout the first act and portions of the second, Ruth speaks eloquently of the benefits of commitment, using as her primary example the relationship between her grandparents. Nick reads nothing into these references, failing to perceive the preparation which Ruth is attempting. He certainly is entitled to a lot of confusion: Ruth uses frank sexual language and in principle is not averse to premarital sexual activity. But she is searching for a relationship characterized by virtues of an earlier time, a quite incredible endeavor, taking into consideration our epoch and the very situation created by Mamet. When she presents her lover with a bracelet inscribed with a promise of lasting love, no one either on stage or in the audience knows what to do with the incongruousness of both the gift and its symbolism. What actually happens at that moment is Mamet's inversion of the ideas of conformity and non-conformity. He exercises the time-honored privilege of theatricality for his generation's sake. Nick, whose posture would have been termed libertine only two decades ago, is now a representative of an official morality, thus a realist, although his stance would have previously been a challenge to the realities of the society and its routine conduct. Ruth, a conformist from a not too remote past, suddenly becomes a challenger of the established realism of human rapport: she desires erstwhile fixtures of love—bracelets, promises, vows, commitments—which now have become symbols and seem to grate against the very texture of regular life.

So effectively is Ruth's angle presented and interpreted that Nick's rejection of her and her gift becomes another surprise. It should not. He is reacting with appropriate shock, a tremor generated in the inner depths of his new socio-moral formation. She has violated the cultural code of behavior under which he had invited her. She has actually asked him to commit himself, to restrict his future flexibility, an action which offends his sense of propriety. Mamet balances the conventionalities with precision, endows them with dialectical weights that exceed the comedy of manners, making out of the crisis of the second act an exercise in moral sophistry, or impartiality, whichever comes first to a predisposed mind.

The essential weakness of Nick's position escapes the audience until later. Instead of the smooth, bittersweet resolution of a relationship gone sour which might have been expected, in the final act Mamet presents a searing, nearly fatal breakdown on the part of Nick. It becomes apparent that Ruth is the healthier human being. In spite of her seemingly old-fashioned notions, in spite of Nick's blistering attack on her for her lack of

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self-esteem, it is Ruth who must console and reassure Nick of his worth. In the exhausted calm which follows the climax, Nick expresses his love for the first time. But the audience senses that the moment for such declarations has passed and that the relationship which might have been, died with the refusal of the bracelet. The insensitivity to a trifling metaphor, causes a defeat.

There's little doubt that Mamet comes across as a compelling mixer of modern theatrical ingredients: he knows how to blend dramatic experience with changing psychological insights—the nuances of both reality and symbol are projected with a calm and sure hand. Throughout the piece, nature is both a topic of conversation and a source of primitive imagery. Nick and Ruth speak of the regenerative powers which they find in contact with nature, a faddish conversational incantation but it is Ruth who seeks and achieves the contact. Nick attempts to match her in sighting local fauna, but fails, a symbolic failure for someone who lives by the instant truths acclaimed as wisdom or progress. He refuses to leave the protection afforded by the cottage, while Ruth takes long walks late at night in the woods, another discrepancy between two ways of attitudinizing.

Mamet's facility with language is impressive. His dialogue throughout manages to maintain the illusion of normal conversation while at the same time cutting beneath the surface to expose, or at least hint at, deeper layers of meaning. This has a cumulative effect upon the audience. It stimulates and entertains, makes possible smooth mental shifts from formal realism to the world of Mamet's making, from moods to statements, from style to messages. In some ways his prose seems to resemble Pinter's, but Mamet's power grows organically from the context of the work rather than as the result of intellectually charged and carefully planted red herrings whose sole *raison d'être* is to delude the audience into believing that they are in the pres-

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Screen

Simon's Revenge and Spielberg's Fast-Paced Bubble

The Goodbye Girl; directed by Herbert Ross; written by Neil Simon; Warner Bros.

***Close Encounters of the Third Kind;* written and directed by Steven Spielberg; Columbia Pictures.**

by Eric Shapearo

If a movie carries in its credits the participle "written," it means that novelist or playwright has contributed more to it than just an idea and the script. It means that he/she has imbued the picture with practically everything—from dialogue to message to the ambience which makes the substance of the end product, and decides its glory or failure.

Neil Simon, as popular magazines inform, is presently America's best known and wealthiest purveyor of light comedy. For years, and with an unpretentious regularity, he has supplied Broadway theaters with two dimensional characters, situations, sentiments and one-liners that are supposed to express sagacity in *bon mots.* As anyone else, however, he himself has a third dimension: he wants to be recognized not only as a tremendously successful entertainer, but also as a subtle, intellectually responsible artist who not only knows a lot about the human condition, but also wants to put his knowledge at humanity's feet as his offering of love, solidarity and faith. In other words, he dearly wishes to illuminate his fellowman's misery with a refurbished hope in goodness, decency and the warmth of the heart. His ability to do this is exactly what the supercilious critics deny him and what they sneer him down for.

To get even with them, he chooses an old weapon: he derides Manhattan theater reformers and addlebrained avant-gardists, and throws in some gibes against actors as species. Had Simon, however, aimed a salvo of parody *ad personam,* or satirized social and cultural fads only, this would not have landed him the sort of minor triumph he actually accomplishes in *The Goodbye Girl.* Instead, he attempts to recreate on screen people who, even if they are broadly drawn in stereotypic lines, still solicit good feelings one from another, seek mutual respect and shared emotions—an exceptional occurrence in the filmland of the '70s. Somewhere in its middle, the movie transcends a comedic routine and becomes an ardent defense of simple and

Continued on following page

Mr. Shapearo has spent his life with motion pictures as a fan.

Chaplin's Exit

Before this issue of *Chronicles of Culture* was completed, the news of Charlie Chaplin's death arrived. He was a man who understood life's poignant simplicities. This, perhaps, accounts for his simplistic approach to the socio-political issues the world dealt with in his lifetime. He was the philosopher of the small and unattainable, the first poet of petty tragedies, and was never surpassed in this respect by anyone in the history of the cinema. But his life, viewed from its endpoint today, may serve as an example of a supreme and kindhearted irony. The man, who devoted his creative power to portraying the melancholy and sadness of misfortunes, died a happy man, with his life fulfilled in a way that few mortals have ever achieved and enjoyed. His magic had made it clear that neither social forces nor history, nor political manifestos make art, that art is created by a spark smoldering in a little guy of no other distinction than his unique genius. An art that the rest of mankind gratefully accepts as its own.

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Screen

Continued from previous page

dear human values. And when Paula (Marsha Mason) announces that love and happiness can best be expressed through a newly purchased bedroom set—that is when she proclaims a *petit bourgeois* delight a center of humanness—she certainly sounds more believable than the entire women's conference in Houston, or the last ten years' output of feminist writing, while Neil Simon scores his sweet revenge and gives a raspberry to existentialists, counterculturists, and junkies of all kinds of liberation. Miss Mason is mightily supported by Richard Dreyfuss who succeeds in suffusing Elliot, from the hack charmer-maverick mold, with lovableness and credible intentions. Then, we have Quinn Cummings, a marvel of a little girl, who as Lucy performs an unheard-of cinematic feat: she pulls off a sketchy portrait of an 8-year old who is fully up to New York of the late '70s and still remains an authentic and sensible child. The presence of Mr. Herbert Ross, the movie's director, is scarcely noticeable, as Mr. Simon and his trio preempt the whole space on screen. After the show, when the lights go up, the faces of the audience radiate satisfaction, and nobody seems to feel that the last two hours were wasted—a rare expression on the moviegoer's faces these days in America.

* * *

Even the most skillful, intellectually mature and philosophically responsible science fiction—a rare occurrence, indeed—is man's construct. This is what distinguishes it from art which must deal in dimensions not of our making. Even if art produces fantasy, we know that the poet, writer or artist who creates it attempts to fathom something he has no sway over. The universe that exists in us and around us, and which determines our destinies and interrelations, transcends our abilities to shape it. An artist can add something to, or touch, a truth about it only by *not* adding anything to the universe. Once he starts enriching it with the products of his intelligence or imagination, he kisses seriousness goodbye.

A young and energetic film director by the name of Steven Spielberg tries his hand at that chronic dilemma and is the most recent one to fail. He is all flair and gusto as an inheritor of the traditional Hollywood skills of putting fast moving images into a coherent and entertaining operation. Mentally, he is a Hollywoodian—an extraterrestrial species—so for him elements like logic have the value of meat tenderizer—good to have but not necessary for the preparation of a steak. In the beginning of his movie—which depicts once again our eventual meeting with creatures from who knows where—he resorts to the Bergsonian devices of dealing with the unknown, galactic, interstellar, out-of-this-world. He dabbles in intuition, a little boy's innocent insight, poetic and metaphorical obsessions of people who had been blessed (victimized?) by exposure to UFO's. The movie is strong in the visual and utterly feeble in reason. The magnificent finale is supposed to demonstrate how the visitors from yonder dwarf the earthlings' technology. We watch it with relish, tending to forget that we have, in fact, manufactured both *our* equipment and *theirs.* Mr. Spielberg may be a *Wunderkind* director, but as with every juvenile, he ignores the fact that the allusive is much more credible than the literal—and thus introduces, at the end, some emaciated little monsters from the impenetrable endlessness that look like the familiar creatures from kiddies' comic strips. He thereby proves that he is a moviemaker but not an artist, as artistry—whether its horizons are here or "there"—must involve something real and human. □

In the forthcoming issue of the *Chronicles of Culture:*

The Cult of Deficient Thinking

"We believe that any *interference with freedom of expression endangers* all *freedom of expression."*
— Richard Howard,
president of PEN American Center, and organization of professional writers, in a letter to *The New York Times.*

"The test of our commitment to a free society lies in the courage to defend the disreputable or the vulgar in the service of a higher goal."
— A *New York Times* editorial.

An unassailable idolatry of irresponsible platitudes, protected by the liberal media, constitutes the gist of the Liberal Culture which engulfs America. *Chronicles of Culture* wishes to present its argument about some examples of deficient thinking.

Also:

Commendables — In Focus — Waste of Money —
Screen — Journalism — Polemics & Exchanges.

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Journalism

The New York Times' Weatherman

After decades of deficient thinking elevated to the rank of a cult by its editorials and columns, *The New York Times* expressed an opinion worth quoting. In an article (*NYTimes Magazine,* December 4, 1977) on a Richard Alpert alias Baba Ram Dass (the erstwhile partner of Timothy Leary in Harvard's aborted LSD experimentation), one of those products of the '60s who sell nothingness, Ms. Colette Dowling observes:

"It has been an outstanding mark of our recent cultural history that we give great power to people who consistently refuse to accept responsibility for their behavior, people who will lie blatantly and then detach themselves from any sense of personal guilt—people, in short, whose symptoms are close to, if not outright, psychopathic. I sometimes think that the inability or unwillingness to distinguish psychopathic behavior is indigenous to being American. We actually choose not *to see. We keep voting for these guys, and taking their classes, and buying their books. We keep forgiving and forgetting, trying to be 'fair,' as if the capacity to deceive and be deceived by others were somehow testimony to our innocence, our monumental goodness . . . We do not give up these heroes easily. I have noticed that they can rise and fall and rise again, arrogance increasing exponentially with each new fall from grace. It is we, the bereft crusaders of the 20th century, who extend our grace indefinitely. Far better to have tainted heroes than none at all. Far better to be led astray than to have to grow up and find out that we're all alone."*

One swallow does not make a summer and a modicum of sobermindedness does not make the *Times* a reliable source of elucidating quotations yet. Such a judgment was unthinkable five years ago in *The New York Times.* But it's refreshing to notice that *The New York Times* does not need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows. □

Rolling Stone's Jubilee— Ten Years of Cynical Innocence

The U.S. anti-cultural scene has celebrated another anniversary—marking the unprecedented success story of the rambunctious arrogance of *Rolling Stone,* a journal devoted to the spasmodic concept of music. During its early days, it advocated rebellion against everything it could not define, or grasp, in the American civilization. Later it grasped some of this civilization's more debatable virtues—like craving for vulgar opulence—and thereafter it dedicated itself to making money on flashy and shallow journalism and advertisement.

In the tenth anniversary issue, *Rolling Stone* editor and publisher, a Mr. Wenner, delivers his profound analysis of the epoch and reiterates the magazine's statement of purpose:

"Bulls _ _ t is still bulls _ _ t, music has its magic that can set you free, and rock and roll will stand . . ."

He does not specify, however, the bondage he is subjugated to, and for which he needs music (Chopin? Le Marseillaise? The Internationale?) to be set free. He counts on the intellectual loyalty of his readers who all know that he is a shackled slave. To our mind, *his* kind of music can eventually set one free *from* all human bonds and traits—witness the photograph in the same issue of Mr. Mick Jagger, a rock-singer humanoid, at his "artistic" climax.

Rolling Stone is the journalistic example of transvestite capitalism: a multimillion dollar operation based on vicious anti-capitalism. Mr. Wenner, its ruling entrepreneur, understood early that the electric guitar would replace the mouth organ as America's new, easily available and portable instrument. Thus, while the big corporations were busy making sound equipment and the electronic audio set accessible to almost every teenager, and the record industry was becoming a prosperous giant, *Rolling Stone* offered its services to both the generation and industry. Both the publication and Mr. Wenner espoused all the stock radical causes and was soon wallowing in money and luxury, firmly protected by the First Amendment's shield in their assault on good sense and human sensibilities. It would therefore be unfair to blame Mr. Wenner for his semantic unsophistication: since he has it so good, he does not need to know what the word "freedom" means. □

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Journalism

Penthouse's Respectability Pitch

A publication entitled *Client/Media News* appears in contemporary Manhattan. Nothing peculiar in this, the trade press has its well-appointed role in the complex society of today. Occasionally, it also reveals the brutal hypocrisy used to forward some special *economic* interests of the publishing industry, and what *moral* price the society may pay for the unmitigated and uncontrollable greed of smut peddlers and pornographic polluters.

Here are excerpts from a sales presentation outline provided by *Penthouse* for the use of *Client/Media News* operatives whose task is to sell the ad space to advertisers in magazines:

"The fact is that Penthouse *not only conforms to community standards of responsible journalism, but in many communities it's the largest selling monthly magazine and has every right to be considered* the *community standard in and of itself."*

"Penthouse *became an instant success. Its audience was young, well educated and well heeled. These were young people who weren't satisifed with dreaming about their fantasies; they wanted to live them.* Penthouse *was a magazine of controversy, not fantasy, and this audience had grown up on controversy. Far from being the post-McCarthy silent generation, this was a generation of open debate, the kind of debate that brought an end to an unpopular war and caused the fall of two presidents."*

"Far from being permissive, they were, if anything, honest and open about their lifestyle, their goals and their aspirations for the nation. They turned to Penthouse *because it represented, in its controversy, a kind of decency they could understand. Frank talk about national issues, honesty in dress, manners and social relationships, and frank discourse about sex —these attitudes have turned into a stable, widely accepted lifestyle.*

Over 50% of Penthouse *readers are married, and these people, men and women, look to the publication as an important aspect of their taste making and lifestyle. Today, in large and small communities throughout the United States, this* Penthouse *lifestyle coexists with a more traditional, conservative view. From a marketer's standpoint, this is the most interesting phenomenon of all."*

"Hustler *has gone beyond what this country is willing to accept at this time. Look at what happened in Denmark when they lifted all censorship around 10 years ago. About 200 publications sprang forth, each one worse than the next. The only way we could compete with them was with quality. We made it better, more elegant, more beautiful, with better photography and added more creative, exciting elements. We couldn't show anything more in terms of nudity because there wasn't anything left to show."*

*"We rely very heavily on the Yankelovich studies which measure social change as it influences consumer behavior . . . Bob Guccione (*Penthouse *publisher) has always been a very good judge. He travels a lot and is always talking to cab drivers and university students."* □

Polemics & Exchanges

On Percy's *Lancelot* and the Literature of the South

We learned, nearly forty years ago, from W.J. Cash that the essence of Southern culture lies in its history. Southern literature, as a rule, dwells on the past, or its consequences, whether in the rural tragedy of Faulkner, whose poor whites struggle with the meanness of backwater settlements mired in untold epics, or the existential pessimism of Flannery O'Connor, or Twain's twangier steamboat stories, where the dark shroud of the bygone times hangs heavily.

Walker Percy's new novel, *Lancelot,* is flavored with his literary heritage as a Southerner, but only faintly. He concedes his cultural identity grudgingly, uses it as a literary gimmick, or tries, and ends up failing. His protagonist, Lancelot Lamar, narrates the novel from his cell in a New Orleans insane asylum. The listener is described as what Percy calls a priest-psychologist, covering all bases. We learn much about Lancelot's troubles, enough to wonder where southern fiction is going, if, as advertised, Percy is a writer of the South.

But then we must wonder, too, if it is valid to characterize literature by geography. It may be, as Cash suggested, that the quasi-feudal gentility of the Old Southern elite was mostly fantasy. The aristocratic Virginians, who included the

Mr. Walsh of the U.S. Industrial Council has a degree in English from St. Anselm College and served in the U.S. Marine Corps.

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polished Southerners most conspicuous in American history — Washington, Jefferson, Lee—constituted, in truth, an anomaly in the social structure of the South. The few thousand wealthy landowners who in 1860 actually owned those stately mansions and more than one hundred slaves apiece were more in the mold of Andrew Jackson: shrewd, tough businessmen, who saw the awesome fertility of the inland pine forest soil, and plowed it for cotton, and more cotton. They were not exactly Rhett Butler types, but a few of their sons, sent to Europe for their education and returning home to serve the South in Congress and the courts, were. Thus the pervasive and likeable Southern myth, that downplays the hardbitten agricultural roots of Southern life, and focuses on the numerically inconsequential gentlemen-aristocrats, promoted a generation ago by Margaret Mitchell. Percy is acutely aware of the myth; his narrator Lancelot discovers it midway through his chronicle. His life has been consummately one of conformity to the circumstances of his birth: moderate civil rights lawyer, gentleman planter (without a plantation), "a composite," he remarks, "of Ashley Wilkes, Leslie Howard, Jeff Davis home from the war, Gregory Peck, plus a bit of Clark Gable as Rhett."

This is, perhaps, why Percy has written two novels actually: one, of the "horrible banality of the past," and another, of what he calls the "pure future."

The novel of the pure future begins early in Percy's tale, with Lancelot's realization that he is cuckolded, but his future, described as the reestablishment of medieval chivalry and general all-around virtue, is less interesting than his man Friday with the M.I.T. scholarship, a black former servant turned electronics genius. The point is Percy's disgust with what he calls the "modern age," which is full of fags, including his son, nymphomaniacs, crooked politicians, phony evangelists, pornography, the CIA, the FBI, muggers, buggers, pornography again, and so on. Lancelot, so long a citizen of it all, will climb out of the sewer of the modern world and go off, the New Pioneer, to recolonize America, starting with Virginia's Shenandoah Valley (Virginia, cradle of the Southern myth), where all will be noble and pure, where men will be men, and women will be saved from the whoredom they've chosen.

Then, trying to uplift us readers as we grovel in the dirt of modernism, Percy sinks back into it himself. His theme suggests at a glance the tragedy and redemption of Dostoevski's Raskolnikov, who, like Lancelot, offended society with a heinous crime. However Raskolnikov is touched at the end by love and faith, Lancelot Lamar raves on in his cell, then, at the height of his madness, is—released! The idea being, of course, that going off to pursue his stoic fantasy of the pure future is the mentally healthy thing to do, while the priest, his patient auditor, taking a small parish in Alabama, remains immersed in the muck of modernity. He, and we, are supposed to learn the truth from Percy's hero, who leaves us to wallow with the fags and the smut peddlers and the boredom of it all. Having himself slaughtered a half-dozen people in his arson of the ancestral manse, he is full of caustic opinions about life—but remorse, none. A line of consistency might have been preserved if he had rotted in the nuthouse, but he goes off, cured, full of hate, and lust, and hot air.

The failure of *Lancelot* is not Percy's analysis of the modern world. We don't need him to remind us of the decay of true morality, of the popular adulation of sick behavior and all its manifestations on the newsstands, in the theatres, in the public restrooms. Exposés of the CIA and lying Presidents are old hat, and poking fun at Billy Graham for befriending Richard Nixon doesn't start the juices of popular outrage flowing. Lancelot's desire to run off to a scenic Shenandoah farmhouse and not be bothered is certainly one any normal ten-year old can sympathize with.

It's the way Percy tells his tale that ruins his novel. While Lancelot, a murderer for the sake of adultery, bitches incessantly at immorality we wonder what it is he's selling. There's a hard, cynical edge to his stance, a cold indifference to human dignity, which is hard to swallow in a book about moral indignation and intellectual distastes. If anything marked the Southern novel, it was not loveable characters, but their intricate expiations for their flesh-and-blood failings, a sense of place, and, again, the impact of time, for better or worse. Percy's characters, his dialogue, and his pretensions lack all three, and his novel rings hollow, in the South, in the North, anywhere. □

Stage

Continued from page 21

ence of a major aesthetic discovery. Mamet's associations are loaded with all kinds of explosives, but their main thrust comes from an integrity of vision. At times, he manages to achieve an almost poetic quality through a precise use of formal language, devoid of contractions. He seems, however unaware of the delusive impact of profanities which, although properly inherent in the phraseology of the situation, very quickly lose their effect through repetition.

Mamet is one of those playwrights who gives actors the tools to work with and excite an audience. These tools include not only a dynamic and versatile language, but a score of physical actions far more extensive than might be expected from the plot synopsis. The economy of some sequences, such as the unconsummated rape of the second act, is not apparent at first, but on reflection becomes another clue to what people on stage essentially want, pursue and do to each other. "The Woods" is an indication that Mamet is concerned with more than merely filling the external forms of modern drama. His concerns are old. He tackles problems which have no solutions, which do not change with the fashions though the fashions pretend to change them. He seems to develop into a playwright worth the time and effort needed to understand his work. □

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Polemics & Exchanges

Time's Journalistic Fairness

Responding to a biased, at least in our opinion, feature, a staff member of the Rockford College Institute wrote to the *Letters* section of *Time.* His letter is self-explanatory and it reads:

To the Editors:

Why is it that those quoted ("The Sexes," Time, *Nov. 21) berating the last 15 years of moral permissiveness automatically become subject to* Time's *condescending adjectives; Rev. Chapman is ". . . hardly taken seriously" and Rev. Jackson is ". . . exaggerating to be sure?"*

Yet the ". . . more intellectual moralists" like Lewis Smedes give ". . . a more reasoned analysis when they tell us that "even religious people are no longer impressed with marriage as an institution." Is it that Time *would rather have us believe the words of the experts whose testimony belies the results of the Yankelovich poll which found ". . . a residual respect for the much-maligned institutions of marriage and family?"*

Time did not print this letter. Instead it published four letters from readers addressing themselves to the article in question, in seeming proof that *Time* is dedicated to printing opposite opinions. Two of them supported the smart and fashionable aspects of the current permissive mindlessness. Two deplored the current dissolution of mores but with vulgar and simplistic reasoning and low-brow terminology. Thereby, an editorial principle has been once again demonstrated: the liberal *Time* does not tolerate an *intelligent* argument against its liberal and radical views. *Time's* tactical device is as ingenious as it is deceitful: in the first place, it publishes articles that pretend to objectivity but contain a discreet but insidious slant. When this is pointed out, the demurral does not see print. In lieu of it, a support for *Time's* sympathies is acknowledged, while objections are also duly noted. With one hitch: the anti-liberal criticism is expressed by letters that have difficulties with formulating a convincing thought in a correct sentence, suggesting the semi-literacy of those who oppose *Time's* sympathy for licentiousness, sexual disorder, "liberating" irresponsibility. Anyone who notices this gambit in the defense of liberal orthodoxy is doomed by *Time* to silence. □

Art and Order

Continued from page 15

which Nabokov does not completely overcome. Useful as he is for raising questions about the nature of fictional reality and as a vehicle for comedy, Kinbote is too seriously flawed to serve as an adequate spokesman for the values of order, vitality, and love embodied in Shade and Shade's poem. The narrator's complete egocentricity, if not his homosexuality, make impossible the kind of interests and compassion revealed in Shade.

At the time of its publication *Pale Fire* was hailed as proof that the novel, a form often in recent years pronounced dead, had been given a new lease on life. That judgment seems at best a trifle exaggerated. *Pale Fire* is not among the great novels in English; it is not even Nabokov's best: but it is, despite its weaknesses, both amusing and technically interesting, and it does affirm once more the value of art and order. □

Waste of Money

Continued from page 19

occurred to me that what Gesell and Spock did for children hadn't been done for us as adults." So she did it. And after the '60s, we all know quite clearly what Dr. Spock did for children. □

Shaw's Self-Debasement

Irwin Shaw; *Beggarman, Thief;*
Delacorte Press; New York, 1977.

Mr. Shaw once had promise. As the author of *Young Lions* and of some short stories which commanded the admiration of the connaisseurs of the genre (critics compared him, at the time, with O'Henry, London and Hemingway), he seemed to be heading toward a prominent place in American letters. Then came novels of consummate craftsmanship projecting overall emptiness, obviously engendered by his Hollywood experience as a script writer, wherein psychological and existential musing of a suspicious quality replaced honest intellectual effort. Then came *Rich Man, Poor Man,* still honorable pulp, a huge financial and publicity success, but a featherweight statement of human affairs. Then, recently, came this sequel to it, which seems just another money-making narrative. Then Mr. Shaw began to give interviews in one of which he spoke about himself in the following manner: "I'll tell you another writer who was ahead of his time on women—Shakespeare . . ." So much for a novelist who once wanted to be serious. □

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About **Chronicles of Culture**

". . . the Rockford College Institute has begun publishing the bimonthly *Chronicles of Culture,* whose purpose will be to review current literary offerings. The first issue, September's, concentrated on the feminine novel . . . It is a singularly big job the Rockford College Institute and *Chronicles of Culture* have cut out for themselves. But it is difficult to conceive of a mission more intimately related to America's ability to survive—or to America's deserving to survive."

—*The Cincinnati Enquirer*

"And the indefatigable Rockford College Institute is bringing out *Chronicles of Culture,* a review of books that may not be reviewed elsewhere or that are widely reviewed from a liberal standpoint . . ."

—*National Review*

"In *Chronicles of Culture,* Leopold Tyrmand and other observers defend Western humanism's basic values and traditions against onslaughts by the mass media and permissive cultural fashion . . ."

—*Conservative Digest*

" 'The Feminine Novel of the Seventies' is the subject of the first issue of a new publication coming from Rockford College Institute . . . The *Chronicles of Culture,* the name of Rockford's new bimonthly, is a good idea . . ."

—*The Ragan Report*

"The defects of liberalism," said Lewis Mumford in 1940, "are not due to isolated mistakes of judgment that individual liberals have made; they are due to fatal deficiencies that go to the very roots of liberal philosophy." These deficiencies he named: chiefly the lack of "any true insight into these stubborn facts of human experience—corruption, evil, irrational desire."

Mr. Mumford's words and views scarcely need any revision as an accurate description of the present situation. Every aspect of our lives is now conditioned by the relentless onslaught of a philosophy whose roots are deficient, but which rules the American culture with a despotism unknown in the American civilization. There are wholesome stirrings of both the mind and the survival instinct to be noticed of late, but there is a long way to go before they penetrate the well-guarded citadels of liberal power which rule the idea industry, the communication oligarchy, the ivory towers of moral-blind education, and the smug opulence of the entertainment giants.

Chronicles of Culture wishes to expose and challenge the reigning philosophy of fatal deficiencies. We are determined to spread a clearer view of culture and its duties. We are open to argument, but we have our view and will spare no effort to make it heard.

Help us in this task. Subscribe to the Rockford College Institute publications.

For a $15 annual fee, the Rockford College Institute is offering a new "Publications Membership." All members will receive the three Institute publications; *The Rockford Papers, Chronicles of Culture* and a newsletter to be introduced soon. All non-periodical publications will be included in the annual fee.

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